ERNST

# JÜNGER

# ALADDIN'S PROBLEM

TRANSLATED BY JOACHIM NEUGROSCHEL

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

# Annotation

Friedrich Baroh, is beset by problems. Anarch, aspiring entrepreneur, and amateur historian of ideas, the aristocratic Baroh is also, unfortunately, a soldier in the East German army. His eventual defection to the West leads to a college degree, marriage, and a good job at his uncle's funeral parlor, but it can't dispel Baroh's other problem, a metaphysical one: each man is alone. Since, paradoxically, this is a predicament he shares with the rest of humanity, Baroh decides to capitalize on it. He embarks on a mind-boggling and macabre enterprise — the construction of Terrestra, an international, nondenominational necropolis situated in the wastelands of Turkey. Soon, secondary businesses are called for: airlines, travel agencies, anything to make Terrestra more accessible to anyone who can afford it. His scheme is so overwhelmingly successful that Baroh is forced to take on help, including the enigmatic Phares, whose unsettling presence and gnomic utterances may, at last, help Baroh to understand the depths of the problem he has set for himself. As mordantly ironic as Evelyn Waugh's The Loved One, Aladdin's Problem is a richly poetic meditation on the rituals of death. In its prismatic complexity, its philosophical depth, Junger's half-mythical, half-political tale becomes a caustic allegory of the conditions of modern life.


- Ernst Junger
  - ~ ~ ~
  - AFTERWORD. THE PARABLE ALADDIN'S PROBLEM OF BY MARTIN MEYER

# Ernst Junger

# Aladdin's Problem

~ ~ ~

## 1

It is time I focused on my problem. Who does not have a problem? — everybody has one, and indeed several. Each problem has its rank; the main problem moves to the center of one's life, displacing the other problems. It incessantly haunts us like a shadow, casting gloom on our minds. It is present even when we awaken at night; it pounces on us like an animal.

A man has a headache now and again; this is not pleasant, but there are remedies. It becomes serious once he surmises that there is something behind it — a small tumor, perhaps. Now, the fleeting worry becomes a steady one; it becomes the main worry.

## 2

Nevertheless, such a main worry is part of everyday life. This becomes obvious when we think of the statistics — for while our man is pondering his tumor, the same worry is preying at the same time on thousands and thousands of other minds on this planet. Do he and those other people then have this worry in common? Certainly, but it nevertheless remains his utterly private and unsharable problem. Everything is at stake: the headache has concealed the tumor, but behind the tumor there may be something else — perhaps a carcinoma.

Then again, there may be NOTHING behind it — the problem may be imaginary. Fear too has its fashion: today it favors nuclear war and the carcinoma — that is, collective and individual destruction.

Earlier, when paralysis was rampant, especially in the upper classes, and there, in turn, among the artists, many people imagined that they had been stricken with this disease, and a few killed themselves as a result. But it is precisely when there is nothing behind it that the problem becomes even more sinister. Terror no longer threatens as this or that, but in its undivided might.

## 3

When I stir my morning coffee and watch the swirling of the streaks, I am observing the law that moves the universe — in the

whirling of the spiral nebulae, in the eddying of the galaxies.

Intellectual as well as practical conclusions may be drawn from this. The sight reminds me of Newton's apple or the steam that Watt, as a boy, saw pouring from the kettle long before he invented his engine. "Food for thought," we say. Evidently, thinking is preceded by a harmony with matter, which is followed by the dreamlike mood that creates thought and from which thought springs.

But what does it matter? Whether the universe whirls or crumbles — the problem remains behind it.

## *4*

The problem is indivisible; man is alone. Ultimately, one cannot rely on society. Although society usually wreaks harm, indeed often havoc, it can also help, although not more than a good physician — up to the inevitable limit where his skill fails.

Above all, no melancholy. The individual can comfort himself by recognizing his situation. Earlier, the religions contributed to this. Their close link to art is no coincidence, for they are its most sublime inventions.

Now that the gods have abandoned us, we must fall back on their origin: art. We have to gain an idea of what or whom we represent. There has to be a workshop somewhere. A potter throws vases, pitchers, ordinary tableware. His material is clay; everything emerges in the ebb and flow of tides, then crumbles into dust, and becomes new material for us.

Our social or moral position makes no difference in this regard. You may be a prince or a wage earner, a shepherd, a prostitute, or a pickpocket — but usually you are like me, an ordinary person.

Everyone has his duty, his task. What was the idea when we were created, what is our mission? — anyone who gives us even an inkling of that has ennobled us.

## *5*

Now I am no poet; I have to admit it, though I can express "what I suffer" — albeit only as a monologue. "Express": that is the right word, whatever the outcome may be. So it all boils down to a liberation, a kind of confession in hope of self-absolution. No other judge, no priest over me.

My time is limited; but anyone can spend a month retreating into the forest or the desert. There, he can describe or better: circumscribe

his problem; it is then defined, though not solved. Perhaps he will celebrate it in song, or he will discover a cave and entrust his problem to the walls with black, yellow, and red earth colors. There, it can slumber until an archaeologist finds it and puzzles over it; but it would be better if it remained covered up forever.

## *6*

Now, to get down to business — first of all, personal business. I look into the mirror or at my Liegnitz wanted poster: Sex, male; age, thirty-seven; height, medium; brown eyes, dark hair with graying temples.

Unusual features: right leg slightly shorter due to an accident. No criminal record. The fact that I spent a few weeks in the guardhouse because of insubordination was not registered.

Religion, Protestant; but since my confirmation, I have gone to churches only on special occasions. Nevertheless, I respect them in their innermost essence namely, as artworks.

Occasionally, I have been tempted to leave the Church; but I have never reached the point of making up my mind. What held me back was not so much the thought of my ancestors turning over in their graves as my persistent adherence to tradition — I am conservative by birth and by inclination, but primarily for convenience. Besides, leaving the Church would damage me professionally. Nor can I discard my manners; but I simply dose them out according to the company and the circumstances.

I remain inconspicuous in clothing and conduct, I wear gray suits of good cloth. I abhor any kind of thronging; at the theater, I prefer the center of the orchestra and an aisle seat, which I can leave quickly and unobtrusively.

At ticket counters and when boarding an airplane, I always get at the back of the line. In fencing, I would rather parry than flinch.

I avoid quarrels and debates, but I am tireless when conversing with a friend, male or female, even if my friend does not share my opinion, which I withhold in society. By the same token, I am a good listener.

## *7*

For several weeks now, I have had a slight facial twitch every morning; my left eyelid droops slightly. Before uttering difficult words like "phenomenology," I have to think briefly, concentrate like a

runner before the start. Then those words come out very glibly.

Those are bagatelles; I assume that I am the only one to notice them, but I observe my interlocutors with an attentiveness that has previously been alien to me. When we discover a lacuna, we easily talk ourselves into it. The lacuna disturbs us like a spot on a suit, the kind of spot that keeps getting bigger the more it is rubbed.

I sleep fitfully; my dreams are growing more vivid. After getting up, I look at myself in the mirror in order to establish my identity and make sure that it is still I. Where can I have sojourned? Perhaps some day I will not come back. One emigrates from one's body and settles in a new homeland. That would launch an adventure that is half frightening, half enticing.

The old garb is threadbare; I should change it, I do not feel comfortable in it. This is the condition of a snake before it sloughs its skin — daylight becomes burdensome; the snake withdraws into its cave.

## *8*

My family was wealthy, with an estate in the immediate principality of Liegnitz, Silesia. Their property was considerable, their name well known. When looking it up in an old lexicon, I find a number of bearers of that name who distinguished themselves in war and peace, in the army and in the government, at court and even in science and scholarship. Further bearers are listed in the Almanac de Gotha and in the military registers. The *Pour le Merite* was awarded five times, the Black Eagle three times. As everywhere else, there were also failures, who either went to America, made a name for themselves as eccentrics, or ended as suicides. One of them was even immortalized in the Pitaval, that collection of famous criminal cases. Thus, one has a thing or two in one's genetic makeup.

All that is long past. Wars and revolutions, liquidations and expulsions separate us from that time. I gaze back at two generations of emigres, refugees, and murder victims. Today, nobody knows our name anymore. Who knows anything about the Katzbach, on whose banks we resided, and where Father Blucher gave the French a good drubbing in the pouring rain. The Katzbach now has a different name, just as I do.

When I leaf through our family history, I can imagine how I would have lived in those days: after being tutored at home, I would have either joined the cadet corps or attended the Protestant Gymnasium, the Knights' Academy. Then, no doubt, I would have reported as a cadet sergeant or as a one-year volunteer in the Liegnitz

Royal Grenadiers' Regiment. That would have been followed by a military career or the university — most likely cameralistics. In those contexts, the family name was a good thing, but one could not rest on such laurels; the discipline was severe. As a rule, one could manage to hold out until the critical period in one's military career. There was also the police lieutenant, the district commander, the traveling wine salesman. Eventually one could retire to one's entailed estate. The landed properties offered a more or less comfortable livelihood.

A pronounced talent led to the Imperial Court: the general staff or the ministries. An old novelist lovingly depicted those Berlin circles; I immerse myself in his works with nostalgia, as if I were hearing the carillon of a church that no longer exists or that has sunk away, like the one in Vineta.

I have been reading a great deal, perhaps too much, ever since my worry began to afflict me. There is also an interdependence here: first comes the worry, then comes insomnia, then the insomnia becomes the main worry. How are the links connected in the chain?

## *9*

All this might arouse the mistaken impression that I plume myself on my pedigree; such is not the case. On the contrary: I keep it hidden, I have stripped doff.

Nobility has become burdensome, even potentially dangerous. That began with the "Ça ira" of the great Revolution. There were recoveries, reactionary periods, major and minor islands like Prussia, Japan, the Baltic; but there can be no doubt concerning the decay of the aristocracy.

Anyone who seeks to fix the blame for such declines — which I refuse to do — must start with himself. The deterioration was preceded by a spiritual weakening. The latter can be seen in people's characters — first of all, the monarchs. There is a limit, at which morality is no longer inherent in action, but instead begins moving away from it and enfeebling it. Charisma wanes at the same time.

I can observe this process within my own family too. The number of failures, idlers, gamblers, eccentrics, and aesthetes increased. People become good-natured, dismount from their horses, sell their forests, turn to trivia, such as commerce, become tennis players or racing-car drivers. You go on like that for a century, living off your inheritance, and then you have to admit more and more bluntly: "The Jew won't pay a penny for what you used to have."

## *10*

It goes without saying that I cast that off There is, to be sure, a hitch: I mean the level on which genes remain constant. Forebears lodge deeper in us than we realize. That sentence deserves to be read twice.

In addition, there is something that I wish only to adumbrate: the Silesian quality. Of our old provinces, Silesia and Westphalia are the ones that stamp the character in a peculiar way. This is something that cannot be cast off.

However successful I may have been in staying inconspicuous, a touch of land and people, of the atmosphere of the Silesian country estate remained. Recognizing it, of course, required a special instinct. Fortunately, I have seldom encountered it; my most unpleasant memory is linked to my service in the People's Army.

## *11*

I was assigned to a rifle regiment; it was garrisoned in my old hometown. The barracks had survived the ravages of time; I was wise enough to hide the fact that the barracks had once borne the name of one of my ancestors — I kept that to myself. I was also the only one who noticed the outline of our coat-of-arms appearing under the crumbling plaster of the entrance archway.

I was soon cured of my misapprehension that a special sense of brotherhood prevails in these armies. Harsh discipline does not usually affect the camaraderie if everything else is in order. Lord Nelson said that Sunday is as good a day as any to hang a deserter; after all, the man knew he was risking his neck. Such aphorisms could not shake Nelson's popularity among the bluejackets; on the other hand, he considered it cruel to deprive a prisoner of tobacco.

People's armies are different: there is no esprit de corps, there is only conformism; they have no history, they have an idea. Everyone observes everyone else, lying in wait for the slightest infraction. Even a smile can arouse suspicion. However, unlike monarchies, the idea is not bound to the person; it is as abstract as it is unclear, a sort of collective feeling which produces fashions and trends that probably ought to be heeded. The commanders are also subject to that feeling; personal popularity is frowned upon.

I do not wish to describe the concrete assault on individuals, because the topic repels me. This attack takes place secretly, behind the walls of prisons, behind the barbed wire of camps. Nevertheless, it is in the interest of the leaders to have some of it leak out.

I suffer from exaggerated objectivity. Although I was profoundly affected, nay, came within an ace of being liquidated, I could not help

feeling a certain admiration during my sleepless nights. They may have had the only recipe for keeping a tight rem on the swelling masses and with their permission at that. They demand uniformization, and they get it. This influences even the liberal states: their fear is their last bastion against decadence.

The intelligent individual has only two possibilities: either to pack his bags or to climb up into the leadership ranks.

## *12*

The barracks did not smell of bread and leather as in the 'old days, they smelled of chemicals. I instantly noticed that there was no laughter. Indeed, laughter seems to be vanishing altogether from our planet — snuffed out as in a solar eclipse. The men were well nourished, but they stole past one another like wraiths in the corridors. My modest hope of vegetating here for a year was promptly dashed.

My tormentor, who had sniffed me out, was Stellmann, the sergeant. I caught his eye at the very first roll call. It was a roll call in full uniform, an inspection of equipment from helmet to boots — for now, only to make sure that the gear was complete. Nevertheless, the previous evening, even after curfew, we had patched and tidied the already heavily worn items. Inexperienced as I was in these matters, I listened to the instructions of the older men in the squad. They knew what Stellmann was particularly fussy about, and they were acquainted with what they called his "obsessions" — for example, in regard to the "kickers." The latter, needless to say, had to have all thirty-two nails and not even a mote of dust, and they also had to be thoroughly dubbined. If Stellmann pressed his thumb on the surface or merely breathed on it, a depression would have to be left. The seams were a difficult matter; they were not supposed to be yellow, much less brown, but had to shine like freshly broken hemp. The shine could not be produced with a brush and soap; you had to use a coin to add the final buff.

When I reported for roll call, I thought I had done a pretty good job of it. We fell in, squad by squad, on the parade ground. After we had stood there for a long time,

Stellmann emerged from the orderly room. The senior N Co reported. Stellmann inspected the squads. This took a long time, for he was thorough. If anyone drew Stellmann's attention, the man's name was noted, and he had to fall in again that evening. At last, Stellmann came to us, and then to me.

I saw him for the first time: a delicate man in a smart uniform. He

had to be a good fencer — the kind who suddenly lunges with his foot. His face was pale; the pallor was emphasized by a small black beard. A certain elegance could not be denied: a soft swaying and rolling reminiscent of a bird's, plus the superior self-confidence of a man who knows his business.

I stood at attention; he ordered me to show him my gear. All the while, he kept staring at me; he had seen through me at first glance. And I too knew whom I was dealing with. It feels odd being stripped by the eyes; it is the prelude to rape.

Right off the bat, he disliked my shirt. Although I had made sure on the previous evening that all the buttons were sewn tight, he said that every one of them was hanging by a thread, and he pulled one out — along with a scrap of the worn linen.

In such cases, men like me have to avoid showing even a trace of irony; I made sure not to contradict him, I remained at attention, playing dead. But there are situations in which anything you do is wrong.

Stellmann took out his thick notebook, which, normally wedged between the second and fourth button, is part of an officer's service uniform. He asked me what my name was, and he wrote it down.

"Report to your patching lesson at 0500 hours!" Dispensing with any further inspection, he wheeled around and focused on the next man.

Now I had a pursuer who stalked me and would not release me from his clutches. If the roster included an unpleasant perquisite, say, guard duty on the railroad to Schweidnitz, then I could bet that I would be detailed — and naturally, he would pick Saturdays and Sundays. It was no use my sneaking into the second row when we fell in: he would scour the gaps until he spotted me.

## *13*

Thus it went on, but I do not wish to go into the afflictions, which kept growing worse and worse. It was obviously hate at first sight, hate for no reason — our horoscopes must have been completely disparate. Or had he sniffed the aristocrat in me, whom I had sloughed off long ago and effaced from my memory? Although I tried to stay free of it, I nevertheless thought about my tormentor day and night; he remained a thorn in my side, whether or not he was present. Once, when we crossed paths on the stairway, I heard him whisper: "I'll get you into prison." — it was a soliloquy and not meant for my ears. We passed one another like two sleepwalkers.

The man was universally feared and especially by me. There was

something sinister about him; military service was merely an excuse for him to satisfy that sinisterness. He would have been dangerous in any circumstances, even without authority of command. This was shown when it was dark. Ifthe company lined up on the parade ground in winter, it was often so dark that you could not see your hand before your face. After the roll was called, Stellmann had fifteen minutes left to straighten up the squad before the captain appeared. Stellmann ordered us to reform column and he drove us around the quadrangle in double time; then came, "Assemble, right and left!" and "Hit the dirt!" We had to boom down like one man falling. He made us repeat it until we got it right: "Goddammit! I'll throw the parade ground in your faces!"

We heard his voice; no one saw him, but everyone trembled. He was the tamer; we were the beast.

After that mental preparation, field duty was truly relaxing for us. The captain was satisfied — it all went like clockwork; Stellmann was an outstanding sergeant.

## *14*

Thinking back, I wonder why I simply did not remain standing when he threw us to the ground. It was dark; he would not have seen me. All of us could have remained standing until he had shouted himself hoarse; then the whole fuss would have been over and done with. But things are not that simple.

Aside from that, I had nothing against the drill per se; this may be a rudimentary memory. There are moments of universal consent, when everything works.

My ancestors also achieved a thing or two in that respect, especially during the Baroque period. After all, running a gauntlet is no piece of cake. But there was something else next to it, below it, and above it, which, at least in hindsight, mellows if not sanctions the suffering. It was part of the era; this is proved by buildings and artworks — from songs and paintings to handicrafts: pewter, silver, porcelain. These things still comfort us today in sounds and sights; plus the free thought of the great systems to the point of self-irony. Once, at the mounting of the guard at Potsdam, Frederick the Great, "Old Fritz," asked one of the generals: "Do you notice something?" The general had no answer, and the old king said: "There are so many of them and so few of us." Perhaps that was the day on which James Boswell, a Scottish liberal, indeed an anarch, was thrilled by the spectacle.

Compared with their uniforms, which the ladies also liked so

much, ours are ugly and gray. We live in times that are unworthy of an artwork; we suffer without apology. Nothing will remain but the sound of *Sheol.* Today, coercion is still approved. Yet, at the same time, grief grows, spreading all the way to the Africans, and my melancholy takes part in it.

## *15*

Needless to say, I racked my brain about how to get rid of my tormentor. A war was out of the question (it automatically solves many problems). I pictured us marching out, to the accompaniment of music, and reaching the front. As soon as we fanned out in the skirmish line, I would kill Stellmann. This was a delight — you have to know your enemy. But there was no chance of war, although everyone was talking about it; besides, in case of war, the men on the army list stay behind in the orderly room. They are the least expendable.

Naturally, I also thought about deserting; but there were snags. The borders were almost impassable, and many obstacles had to be overcome before you reached the mine belt. Only choice men were detailed there as guards. At the very least, you had to find a buddy — but who could be trusted? Anyone might be an agent. I rejected the idea; I'm not one for foolhardiness.

Aside from that, the word "desertion" does not sound appealing to me. I am backward in such matters — not, of course, because I would honor contracts made with atheists. Even atheists do not renounce an oath of allegiance, although they may have another word for it. I was indifferent to that, but not to my self-respect. Finally, I could shoot myself at the rifle range or while cleaning my gun. Stellmann, no doubt, would have labeled this a self-mutilation, and he would not have been mistaken. Self-mutilation is regarded as second only to suicide, the acme of desertion. That is why there are extremely shameful rules for interring suicides. Who does not know the night of sorrow? Tossing and turning on my straw pallet, I became a shadow of my former self Physical destruction was preceded by moral destruction. In the end, such a case inevitably calls for prayer.

## *16*

I cannot judge whether it helped. In any case, there was a turn of events, whatever may have led to it.

Escalading was one of our captain's obsessions; no exercise went

by without our being driven across a series of obstacles. The captain stood there with a stopwatch. We leaped over hurdles and ditches, clambered up scaling ladders, squeezed underneath barbed wire. At last came the escalade wall; it was high. That morning, I had made good time. Normally, you climb down the other side using only your hands; I wanted to do something extra, so I jumped down. The result was a broken leg; the medical orderlies had to carry me away.

When they x-rayed me at the hospital, they found a spiral fracture. I underwent several operations; I had to spend three months lying flat on my back, until the medical corps captain said: "The reserve can retire; your hitch is over."

## *17*

Accident suffered during service; that was a good discharge, almost a pass key. Limping with my cane through the garden of the convalescent home, I pondered my prospects. It was fall, the asters were still blossoming, the October sun was shining.

If we get into a difficult situation, say, prison, we have to resign ourselves. Even better, we can derive some benefit from it. Our situation can then function as a step towards our self-realization. The same is true of successes: we should not take them for granted. They can always be trumped.

Whenever Bertha and I played checkers during the evenings of our first year of marriage (that was later), she would sometimes say: "You're cunning — you turn every windmill into something to tilt at."

The same applied here. When I returned to my company in regard to my discharge, I had already forged my plan. Stellmann stood at the barracks entrance; I hobbled past him with my cane and saluted — not with my hand at my forehead, but with an exact turn of my head. He crossed his arms and glared at me.

Inside, I reported to the captain; he allowed me to sit. He said: "My dear B., we have to part, I'm sorry. I'll miss you; there's more to you than I heard from the sergeant. But you know: duty is duty. In any case, good luck in your future endeavors."

I rose to my feet and stood at attention: "Sir, may I request permission to remain in the army — I am still fit for service."

This had never happened before; I was tilting at a windmill.

## *18*

Word about my zeal had spread quickly: the colonel received me

benevolently. I was a shining example. Like some of the older officers, he had once served "King and Country." He enjoyed being addressed in the third person, albeit only privately. He pointed out to me that, after his head, an infantryman is dependent on his legs.

"Sir, if I may respond: I believe it makes no difference in a tank or an airplane."

He liked that; he patted me on the back and rang up the doctor. I was thoroughly reexamined and then detailed to the military academy. Needless to say, I had to undergo tests, but there was nothing negative in my background. Good marks, no criminal record. Stellmann had once put me in the guardhouse, but that can happen. It was not raked up until later. Above all: I was politically sound.

## *19*

One can capitalize on a leg injury as need be. It sometimes improves, sometimes gets worse — depending on circumstances, especially the weather. I benefited from it at the military academy; I wore it like a decoration. They were considerate toward me, especially for drills and field duty. I made up for this in the theoretical courses. I followed the instruction attentively, occasionally asking a question — the kind that instructors like. I did this not just in order to score with them, but also because I grow all the more interested in power the higher the level on which it is manifested.

The general spiritualization now emerging is also expressed in tactics. It is astounding to see how inventiveness grows in nature and in technology when existence is at stake. This applies to both defense and pursuit. For every missile, an anti-missile is devised. At times, it all looks like sheer bragadoccio. This could lead to a stalemate or else to the moment when the opponent says, "I give up," if he does not knock over the chessboard and ruin the game.

Darwin did not go that far; in this context, one is better off with Cuvier's theory of catastrophes.

## *20*

So much for tactics; those are mental games. The same holds for "Morale," which was taught as the second major subject. In this respect, I was fortunate in having studied social theories from early on. I had been inspired to do so by the fate of my family. As I grew up and tried to form an opinion, Socialism was not merely an academic subject for me; I read its major works — often until late at night.

Incidentally, I also memorized. poetry, which was quite out of fashion.

It behooves instructors to define and categorize exploitation. An indispensable tool in this regard is a knowledge of history, which most theoreticians are weak in, nay, often lack. They are trapped in the present; this leads to adulteration, even falsification.

Exploitation is inevitable; without it, no state, no society, indeed, no mosquito can exist. It is endured and tolerated for centuries, often barely noticed. It can become anonymous; one is exploited no longer by princes, but by ideas; slaves and masters exchange faces.

I do not wish to get into that. The important thing in teaching is to assign evil to the past, to the unenlightened times, and, in the present, to the enemy. The exploiter is not the enemy; rather, the enemy is the exploiter.

The instruction examination took place on a Saturday. I was quizzed only once; I had the instruction company in front of me and the faculty of the military academy behind me. The topic was the American War between the States. I stuck to the assigned readings, but, almost imperceptibly, went a little beyond them. This is a good spice, but one to be used sparingly.

## *21*

"What good does it do the sugar-cane slave if he is put to work on the assembly line? He remains a Negro; he has been pulled out of nature — and now he is controlled by Taylor's system. We must regard every war as progress — that is to say, as progress only within the capitalist system. The exploitation remains; it is more refined. From our point of view, progress is the attainment of a new level of consciousness. "

So much for my self-quotation. I had said: "The exploitation remains," but not, "It remains under all circumstances." Nevertheless, it could stimulate in this respect. The objective analysis of the enemy includes a great deal of self-criticism. Incidentally, I had ventured into this diversion not with a pedagogical goal, but for my own pleasure.

My speech was applauded, and the things I had left out also brought me success. After the commander had praised me, one of the officers came up to me: "I liked what you said about the Yankees; I'd like to pursue it personally with you." He invited me over that evening.

## *22*

This officer, a Pole, was a young captain; he had served in the Foreign Armies division and had then been assigned the post of instructor at the military academy. He was a native of Stettin (Szczecin), and his last name was Muller; his parents had made sure to give him a good first name.

At the outset, we addressed each other respectively as "Captain" and "Cadet Sergeant" (which I had become in the meantime), then as Jagello and Friedrich. Jagello had a typical horseman's build: broad shoulders and hips, narrow waist, elegant movements. Ever since the cavalry dismounted, switching partly to the air force and partly to the tanks, the old categories are no longer recognizable. Nevertheless, they can be guessed at, somewhat like the signs of the zodiac. Your choice of regiment was not mere chance: it depended on whether you preferred riding light or heavy horses, fighting with the sword, the epee, the lance, or, like the dragoons, with the rifle. This was contingent on both physique and character. Dragoons had made a name for themselves in Oldenburg, cuirassiers in Mecklenburg, hussars in Hungary, and uhlans in Poland.

In these terms, Jagello was an uhlans Some armies assigned the uhlans to the light cavalry, and others to the heavy cavalry; they are not as lighthearted as the hussars, or as solid as the cuirassiers, whom the prince preferred as his bodyguards.

A Pole is inconceivable without a horse; his love for horses exceeds even the Hungarian's. To his detriment, he persisted in this love too long. Military history contains the account of a final attack, in which Polish lancers rode out against tanks.

## *23*

This passion may explain why superiors ignored minor irregularities in Jagello's uniform. It was gray like all the others, but somewhat daring in its cut and cloth. While riding, even when on duty, he wore boots with a silver trimming. He took part in horse races, even abroad; this was encouraged and liked. A railroad car for carrying the horses to Nice presented no difficulties.

Jagello's features were regular and nicely chiseled the kind of face that used to be called aristocratic. It would have been pale had his duties not taken him outdoors so frequently. Although a night worker, he had already exercised two horses by reveille: one in the manège and one in the countryside.

He said: "Riding is indispensable if you want to be in command. For the sake of our reflexes, we also ought to include tennis in the duty roster. If I were a writer, I would start the day with books and

pictures — I reserve my nights for them."

He was, indeed, well read, not just for an officer. It was a mystery to me where he got the time. He was especially familiar with Russian literature; here, he had a preference for Western European motifs, say, Turgeniev's nihilistic Bazarov or Chekhov's stories. Once, at his prompting, the students of the military academy staged Gogol's *Inspector General.*

He was almost professionally obliged to have a thorough knowledge of history, it was part of his stock-intrade. Here too, he knew how to combine business with pleasure, namely, by reading journals and memoirs; he said they brought the fine structure into the skeleton. When we met, he was reading Helbig's *Russian Minions.*

## *24*

Encountering a man with a literary and historical background was a godsend in those surroundings. One timidly touches a key and hears something that one scarcely hoped to hear: the sound. This is followed by an — almost imperceptible — smile of collusion. That was how it began, and it evolved into almost perfect harmony. We played through problems — such as: "Was Raskolnikov right when he thought of himself as Napoleon?" And: "To what degree does Napoleon exist in each of us?"

I have Jagello to thank for straightening me out in regard to some ofmy doubts. For example, I was plagued by the question of why we were serving — indeed zealously a system that we both found repulsive, and why we enthusiastically supported the development of weapons that would eventually blow us up too — that was the peak of schizophrenia. Jagello said:

"Schizophrenia is a trademark of subalterns, hence it is universal. They stay on the plain, they cannot change their spots. Raskolnikov was schizophrenic; he was both Napoleon and a starving student. Had he kept his knowledge to himself, he would have gone very far. Instead, he murdered the usurer. He was already wearing inside himself the chain in which he was sent to Siberia."

In contrast, Dostoevsky had performed and solved the experiment on a higher stratum. The usurer was killed here too, but the action remained in a spiritual space.

This stratum was the crucial one. You could descend to the plain, you could leave it to its own devices, you could enjoy it as a spectacle or interfere.

I could not quite go along with that; for after all, sooner or later, you have to take sides and you become vulnerable, as the gods

themselves do in Homer. However, conversing with Jagello was fruitful for me, even if we did not reach an agreement — or perhaps precisely at those times.

Jagello used to protect himself with quotations; for this topic, he removed a well-thumbed book from the shelf. I thought it was the Iliad — it was *The Birth of Tragedy*. He read: "The problem of science cannot be perceived on the ground of science…. Science has to be seen with the eyes of the artist." In this regard, we were of the same opinion — just as both of us believed that we would be redeemed either by the poet or by fire.

## *25*

Usually, we were still talking when it grew dark. The room was smoky; the samovar steamed on the table. Jagello loved strong tea. He loved cigarettes with long tips; often, he would take only a few puffs — he never inhaled. He would say: "There are vices that cancel one another out. When I smoke heavily, it affects my stomach. I prevent this by drinking a lot of tea."

While people may become very intimate, even among brothers, there are still taboos. We avoided them after recognizing them. One day, when there had been another rumpus in the Sejm, I found Jagello absorbed in his newspaper. He said: "It's so ridiculous that they can't overcome their fiasco."

I replied: "And yet with Pomerania, they have one of the richest soils, where prosperity was at home."

I had tried to express myself neutrally, but Jagello was obviously disgruntled. This was a wound for him — and for me too. The difference was that for him Poland, and for me Pomerania, were not yet lost. Our friendship was put to a test, which it survived.

When we travel today, not only in Europe, but also in faraway countries, we feel that a brother lies under the ground. He calls to us, and we have to restrain ourselves like the sons of Korah in Psalm 88: "Prayer in great tribulation and imminent mortal danger."

## *26*

Spring had come. Our nights grew longer and longer; sometimes, when we separated, day was already dawning toward us. Our work did not suffer — on the contrary: we became as alert as if we had been trained in abstracting. I was allowed to accompany him on his early-morning rides.

Jagello's friendship also brought a change in my career. At the end of the military-school year, I became a lieutenant; Jagello was also promoted — he was now the youngest staff officer, and he was posted as attaché to the Berlin embassy. From there, he requested me as his assistant. This presented no difficulty; the Foreign Service offices were generously staffed. There were no qualms about my reliability or my qualifications; no one objected.

We continued our dialogues in our new relationship. But now we had to exercise greater caution, for these embassies are touchy places; the walls have ears, all dealings are monitored. The word "friendship" strikes a sour note. As in the old religious seminaries, the officials prefer the comrades to go in threes during breaks rather than in twos.

## *27*

Here too, there was a great deal to learn. Jagello showed me several files that were not meant for my eyes, even though he knew that I got together with old friends and relatives. My life was pleasant, and I could take my time.

One morning, when we were riding in the Tiergarten, I casually said: "Jagello — I'm going to defect."

He showed little surprise: "I've sensed it for a long time — in fact, I knew it from the very start. You're expecting a great deal from me — it would have been better if you had said nothing."

"I wouldn't and couldn't do otherwise. I suggest that in the next situation report you write that you have developed doubts about my reliability. I'll be gone before my recall order comes from Liegnitz."

Once again, my friend proved that he could think. He said: "The response won't come from Liegnitz, because the report goes to the central office — and besides, I should have notified the ambassador the instant I had any doubts. And above all: if you were to vanish right after that, they would certainly conclude that I had put on the brakes — that we had conspired together. You did study Oppenheimer's trial, after all."

Oppenheimer was a nuclear physicist — and one of the schizophrenics — whose superior had been accused of this kind of complicity in a similar situation. Jagello was right: he would have to be as flabbergasted by my disappearance as anyone else.

So I put my papers in order, took along my documents, and asked for political asylum in the West. All I had to do was cross the street.

## *28*

All things considered, this was no easy step for me — and not only because ofJagello. After all, I was breaking off a good career. I won't go along with phrases like "more freedom." I am no liberal — at least not in the sense that people have to get together and vote on the matter. One carries freedom inside oneself; a man with a good mind will realize his potential in any regime. Once his good mind is recognized, he will advance anywhere, cross any line. He does not pass through the regimes, they pass through him, barely leaving a trace. He can do without them, but they cannot do without him. If they are strict, it hones his intelligence. Besides, the regimes are visibly growing alike; good cheer is vanishing everywhere, even the *sourire* is vanishing in Paris.

## *29*

So much for my background. I would like to conclude with an anecdote I heard from one of my ancestors; he had witnessed the event. Steinmetz, the Prussian marshal, the victor at Nachod and Skalitz, became intransigent, indeed almost peculiar in his old age, like many generals who have served honorably. At times, Blucher thought the old man had an elephant in his head. In 187o, when Steinmetz was put in charge of the First Army, Waldersee said that the old man was already three-quarters crazy. And in fact, he ordered some bizarre maneuvers and was then put second-in-command to Prince Friedrich Karl. Naturally, Steinmetz was deeply offended.

When the marshal was holding a conference after Gravelotte, the prince and his retinue rode by at a certain distance. Steinmetz took no notice. Friedrich Karl sent an aide-de-camp to the marshal, asking him to report. The obstinate old man refused. With a heavy heart, the king then relieved him of his command and appointed him governor of Silesia.

Those are old stories; Steinmetz is no longer even mentioned in the encyclopedia. I have brought him up because the Prussians are surviving more strongly in the East than in the West — not in the tradition, of course, but in the style. Jagello was a good example. That explains why, when I picked up my papers in Liegnitz, I could imitate the prince — albeit only *en miniature,* but with success — and in the East German People's Army at that.

It occurred before my transfer to Berlin. Coming out of the barracks in my new uniform, I saw Stellmann on the square, he was operating at full capacity. Saluting me casually, he turned back to the troops. He was not to get away with that. I strode over to him:

"Don't you know you're supposed to identify yourself, Sergeant?"

He gaped at me and grew even paler, a chalky white. Then he pulled himself together. "Second Company, rifle inspection, sir."

"Thank you, carry on." That was my final encounter with him.

## *30*

My problem is not in my profession. I have certainly had my share of trouble here, like anyone else. At first, I was even a washout; but I developed into what is known as a climber. The pattern of my military career was repeated in business. On the whole, it seems to me that we follow the same law in every segment of our lives. Plainly, our makeup is not only linear, but also cyclical. Neither excludes the other. A tire rolls across asphalt.

My desertion made headlines; I had foreseen this. Now I could have gone on with my career in a different context; offers came for secret services. I had a list of Eastern agents inside my head, but I made no use of it. Betrayal of whoever it might be is not my thing; Jagello had likewise not expected it of me. He could put his mind at ease. Anything written in a newspaper is soon forgotten, thank goodness, but it remains in the registers and may eventually resurface.

I was unemployed now and almost penniless. It was, as they say, too little to live on, too much to die with. Initially, I had a small subsidy, my relatives could contribute a little. They opened their front doors themselves now, and they did not look pleased when I knocked. I did a lot of walking and got to know the mood of someone who wonders whether or not he can afford to have his shoes resoled.

What does one do in this situation today? One smokes opium or goes to the university. I opted for the university after weeks of spending most of my time in bed. I went out only to go to the library, from which I returned laden with books.

I had old-fashioned notions about Alma Mater and the professors. Soon I realized that I could get nothing out of them. I often felt as if eunuchs were tussling with hermaphrodites. Schizophrenia was trumps. The natural sciences were encoded, history and the humanities politicized. The theologians were still lagging behind Darwin or even Copernicus and, swinging their train-oil lamps, they actually plumed themselves on their boldness. Pedagogical eros was lacking altogether; it was replaced by a kind of complicity. Where were the times when an electrical aura emanated the instant the professor appeared?

I would never have dreamed that I would long for the barracks; but even when Stellmann was yelling at us, there was still a demonic atmosphere. Not only Konigsberg was a ruin, but also Heidelberg,

Tubingen, Gottingen. They were still dominated physically, spiritually, and morally by the gray factory-style of the nineteenth century, whether one entered a laboratory, a school, or a hospital. Plus the nightmarish sense that this could only be a thin skin with something monstrous hatching underneath.

I lacked a friend to share my sorrows and yearnings, someone to converse with. I missed Jagello; though we lived in the same city, we were further apart than antipodes.

## *31*

But what good did it do? Our farmers say that you can't ask an ox for more than a piece of beef. So I focused on what was offered, and the subjects I chose were advertising, statistics, computer technology, insurance, journalism.

My situation improved considerably when I married Bertha. We had met in the student restaurant. At first, our relationship seemed casual, but soon it deepened. Bertha was not only a good lover physically and mentally, but also a reliable companion. Being both cultured and practical, she knew how to give our life a framework in which we felt good. Granted, she had to break off her studies — classical languages. Nevertheless, they came in handy: she compiled the catalogues in a second-hand bookshop; however, she also had to help out in the store and at the cash register.

We kept to ourselves in one ofthe many-storied apartment houses, as if in a cell; we had no friends and only the unavoidable acquaintances. We could call ourselves happy, aside from the fact that Bertha was usually quite exhausted when she returned from the bookshop. This profession too calculates more with machines than with the mind; nevertheless, the work is more draining than it used to be — that is how we are hoodwinked by the machine world.

I often felt sorry for her when I saw her in the evening, as she pulled herself together at the table. I had done the shopping, no cans, and had prepared the meal, except for the spices; plus a glass of wine. These are happy hours; we relish our own delight in the other's delight.

We had the weekends, and then vacations: Mallorca, Sicily, Tunisia. Above all, my studies were gradually coming to an end, and I hoped I would soon find a profession.

## *32*

And indeed I did, although I began with a modest, perhaps even slightly disreputable job. Let me fill in the background.

I remember my grandfather as a small, wiry man. He was also my godfather; I was named Friedrich after him. He went straight from the Liegnitz Barracks into the first of the great wars, fighting until the end — initially at the front lines, then on Mackensen's staff. He liked talking about the Rumanian campaign; those were still operations in the old style. He extended the war after the Treaty of Versailles by joining a Free Corps and distinguishing himself in a skirmish — at Annaberg, I believe.

This contributed to our family's holding on to its property for another thirty years.

I am not well-versed in these dates, for, while I am enthralled by history, my studies only went up to 1888, the Year of the Three Emperors. For me, that year marks the onset of the labor pains of Titanism, the ahistorical era. That year, Nietzsche decided to build his work "toward the catastrophe," shortly before the breakdown in Turin.

So much for these marginalia, which touch on my problem. My grandfather did not personally benefit from the reprieve he had helped to bring about — he was a younger son. Furthermore, the estates sank deeper and deeper into debt — at least until old Hindenburg's Eastern Aid. My grandfather inherited little; the best thing he got was a comfortable apartment near Charlottenburg Castle. In my childhood, I often visited him there. The rooms were relatively small. They contained old furnishings; and paintings, some of them gifts from monarchs, hung on the walls all the way out into the vestibule. Anything I know about my family history I learned there. Beyond that, more general things, for the old man liked reading memoirs and was a good anecdotist.

I say "the old man," because that was how he struck me back then; basically, he was still quite jaunty. This can be inferred from the mere fact that prior to the second catastrophe he was thinking of donning his uniform once again. But he was already having health problems; his prostate was becoming troublesome, he suffered from gout, which was revealed partly in the strangely elaborate way his fingers curled around his cigarette when he smoked.

## *33*

Given his heritage, my grandfather could have been a stalwart reactionary; but that, as Stirner puts it, was "not his business," or was, at best, his private business. He cultivated this business in his Steglitz apartment with the old furnishings and paintings; outside his

apartment, you could not tell. I even think that our left wing lacked people like him. In this respect, I probably inherited a thing or two from him. How else can I explain that after graduating from the Gymnasium, I went back to Liegnitz of my own free will?

In any case, my grandfather resolutely put an end to what he called "old chestnuts." He still subscribed to *Das Adelsblatt,* an aristocratic gazette, but read liberal newspapers — not just their business sections. He invested his settlement in one of the major insurance firms, and also took a position there. Now he wore suits of Scottish wool and gray ties with a pearl tiepin; the medal in his lapel had been replaced by the Rotarian cogwheel. He loved word games and mental games, and would say: "I have advanced to the position of Rot-Arier [Red Aryan]." He treated his new name similarly, for he had discarded the old one along with his title. "What should I do with it when I call on a client? It would embarrass both of us and interfere with business. We Iduna employees are discreet."

Following the example of Philippe Egalité he named himself Baroh — so that his clients unwittingly addressed him as "Herr Baron." I inherited this name from him and I can introduce myself as Friedrich Baroh.

## *34*

I now come to Uncle Fridolin. My father did not grow old; the location ofhis grave is unknown. His name appears on my grandfather's headstone: "Missing in the Caucasus." He had two sisters: Friederike and Erika. Friederike was an ugly duckling, slightly hunchbacked, but goodnatured and a perfect housewife. Erika was beautiful, she never married, and she died during the destruction of Berlin in circumstances that I prefer not to mention.

The man who chooses a wife like Friederike is heeding a sense of realism that no imagination can dim; and he will not be deceived. Uncle Fridolin was such a man. He too had little to offer in the way of external assets, but he was a reliable man. Gradually, both of them recognized one another in their concealed harmony.

Later, it actually turned out that Friederike had made a good match. She brought along a modest fortune, but Fridolin did not find this out until he asked Grandfather for Friederike's hand, as custom demanded. Fridolin was actually embarrassed by their aristocratic background; it had not determined his choice — something for which his betrothed thought highly of him. "It was a love match," she would say.

On the one hand, Grandfather was not displeased that Friederike

was getting hitched; but on the other hand, he was not exactly thrilled. Whenever he wanted to shrug off an adversity, he would lapse into the Potsdam jargon — albeit not as grossly as Papa Wrangel, who had lived in this neighborhood a century ago.

"That's all I needed, Fridolin Gadke, a little bookkeeper — and in a coffin factory to boot. But aside from that, not bad, not bad at all we had a good talk — basically, the girl's a lucky stiff "

## *35*

What could they have had a talk about — and a good one, at that? Life insurance and coffins — these topics made for an initially vague interest, which grew as Uncle Fridolin began to prosper.

In my Gymnasium days, I occasionally paid the couple my obligatory respects. I did not enjoy visiting them, even though Aunt Friederike regaled me nicely. She was very attached to the family. They lived on one ofthe austere streets between the Spree River and Alexanderplatz. Their apartment was kept squeaky-clean and was radiant with lack of taste. The atmosphere was thoroughly unartistic. Conversations never got beyond the most banal subjects.

Uncle Fridolin was an ordinary man such as one meets everywhere in offices and behind counters, and promptly forgets. He was painstakingly neat, energetic, correct. He wore off-the-rack suits plus, as the phrase went in those days, "cuffs and crays" — that is, removable cuffs and a tie.

I found his eyes strange, if not exactly pleasant; they were dark and had what I would like to call a "character gaze," the ability to see character. What I mean is a knack for immediately grasping a person's solvency — and this gift was quite pronounced in him; it surpassed his overall level. Thus he would have very quickly seen through an imposter — not only if the latter had introduced himself as a prince or millionaire, but also as a professor or composer. It must, however, be emphasized that my uncle did not have the foggiest clue about the sciences or the arts. But he did have a sense of, almost a nose for, quality and distinction.

Uncle Fridolin was good at figures and an excellent draftsman; he had served with the Railroad Transit Corps. His talent had soon made him indispensable there, but he had never advanced beyond the rank of private. This did not trouble him; he had done his stint loyally. He was still devoted to the monarchy.

On weekdays, he would rise incredibly early — gingerly so as not wake Friederike. He stepped into a shallow basin and scrubbed himself from head to toe. Then he sat down at his easel and drew.

Coffins vary in size and quality; often, personal wishes of customers had to be satisfied. He relied in part on a small library of heraldic, symbolic, and even botanical imagery. Subsequently, he enlarged his collection when he began dealing with headstones as well. Although moderately atheistic, he did have to consult the Bible. He refrained from officially leaving the Church because of his basic conservatism — besides, it was important for his profession.

By the time Friederike served morning coffee (it improved with time), my uncle had already been working for two or three hours. Even when I called on them, I usually found him at his easel. Before greeting me, he would wash his hands and remove his sleeve protectors. We would then converse, mostly about politics — a topic that made him uneasy — and at best, button painting. My aunt would question me about Liegnitz, especially when I had spent my holidays there, and, after making my farewells, I recovered by taking a detour through Treptow Park.

## *36*

I have already mentioned that my uncle began to prosper. Friederike's dowry helped him in this respect; he started his own business, the well-known funeral home Pietas. The time was favorable, coinciding as it did with a flu epidemic. Doctors and pharmacists were up to their ears in work; it also filled the cemeteries. The Lower Saxons say: "One man's owl is another man's nightingale."

Uncle Fridolin was a dexterous planner; his business grew visibly — not in a hectic way, but step by step. The bad times that came later could make no dent in it quite the contrary.

The upswing also raised my uncle's lifestyle. He gave up his apartment and moved into the fashionable West Side ofBerlin, purchasing a house in our neighborhood, on Fichtenberg. He now met my grandfather not only *en famine* but at the Rotarians. He wore custom-made suits, Friederike wore silk frocks and, in winter, a fur coat. His demeanor was as correct as ever; it was joined by growing authority.

## *37*

Grandfather said: "Fridolin is presentable." Indeed, gradually, my uncle became our *piece de resistance.* That too is a statistical matter: the decline of old families. The time comes when they either face extinction or need replenishment. Power slips from their fingers; they

suffer the fate of drones or come to an arrangement. British lords, French marquis marry billionairesses, who restore their castles. Princesses elope with bandleaders. The Hungarians say: "In our country, coachmen are fathered by counts and counts by coachmen."

Regarding the nobility, there were two big thrusts: the first, in the French Revolution; the other, in the two world wars, which future historians will, presumably, not separate. Salient turning points came when the entails were broken by the Code Napoleon and then by the Weimar Constitution, the goal being a redistribution of land. This was made possible by the spiritual weakness of the aristocracy, which was also physically liquidated in vast areas. Numerous members of my family did not escape this fate.

Quite generally, one may say that Prussia was well represented by the nobility until the Franco-Prussian War. Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon were paragons. The decline is evident when we compare portraits from that war with those from World War I — say, the portrait of Wilhelm I with that of Wilhelm II, or that of old Moltke with that of his nephew. But then, in my father's generation, came Moltke's grandnephew, Helmuth James Moltke, who was executed.

## *38*

I close the circle: Uncle Fridolin did not contribute to our replenishment like the Hungarian coachmen. In this respect, he most likely did little; at any rate, Friederike did not bear him any children. Thus, I will probably be his heir, although this has no meaning for me; for either my problem will be solved on a higher level, in which case I will have no need of money, or else my problem will be my doom. At any rate, there will be enough for a cell in a madhouse or even in a private sanitarium.

Financially, however, we were considerately replenished by Friederike's marriage in the changing times and their catastrophes. My uncle became a lifesaver for Bertha and me after I obtained my university degree. In choosing my subjects, I had thought of my grandfather. But he had died in the meantime, and even the most modest jobs in his firm were taken. I had wasted important years in Liegnitz. After Grandfather's death, we moved into his Steglitz apartment and lived there rent-free but lavishly. I was surprised by a tax for "residing in one's own home" and other vexations — all in all, today's exploitation surpasses by far the practices of absolute monarchy. The state has become a multi-armed octopus, drawing blood in thousands of ways. There was only one thing I liked more than in the East: in your free time, you did not have to march behind

the flag and yell hurrah, and also you could read and write whatever you wished.

There were weeks when I looked forward to Sunday — not because I had nothing to do, for I was idle even on workdays. But at least Sunday brought no mail with dunning notices and rejections. And at breakfast, Bertha's face was not so distressed.

We slept under one blanket, and at night, when I woke up with a start, I mused how good it would be if we never got up again. I reached out and felt Bertha next to me. I was safe here; I wished that it could always be like this, and that we, occasionally waking up, could lie next to one another for years — centuries.

Nevertheless, this period provided me with time to read. I learned more from books than at the universities. Day and night, I lived with the philosophers, the classics, and also the Bible as in a mountain range with its wellsprings and valleys — so long as I was not writing and answering ads or looking for a job. Bertha took over most of my correspondence. The offers were sobering: vacuum-cleaner companies were looking for enterprising peddlers, chinchilla farms wanted to dispose of their animals for a "nominal investment."

Nor did I fare any better with the heads ofpersonnel departments — if I so much as managed to get that far: their psychological training in dismissing people was perfect — from offering a cigarette to buzzing the secretary who showed me out. "You'll hear from us as soon as something comes up." But nothing ever did come up.

## *39*

Going to Uncle Fridolin was almost an act of despair; naturally, I had already thought of him. My reluctance is shown by the number of visits I had tormented myself with before calling on him. My lack of eagerness was probably due in part to my memory ofthe days when the family had somewhat looked down on him.

I went to see him not at his office but at his home, which was only one block further. Aunt Friederike's coffee was excellent now; I missed her home-made cakes, but, to make up for them, there were petits-fours from Schilling's Pastry Shop. We "chitchatted" at length, as the Lower Saxons put it. Finally, when twilight was setting in, I came out with my request.

My uncle showed little surprise. He looked at me with his "character gaze," perusing me for a long time — not as inscrutably as the heads ofpersonnel departments, but skeptically, like the little bookkeeper that he had been. My aunt placed her hand on his arm. He took off his spectacles and said:

"Friedrich — I expected this. Come to my office tomorrow morning at eleven. Bring along your documents — every last one of them, starting with your birth certificate."

## *40*

The next morning, accompanied by Bertha's good wishes, I stood outside his firm on Potsdamer Strasse. Having come early, I spent a quarter of an hour pacing up and down in front of the building. The bombs had spared it. It had only been "aired out" — and not until the final days of the Reich Chancelery. My uncle had redone the rooms for his needs and added a new facade. No show window — whatever belonged to the final arrangements could be seen in the branch offices. There was a sign at the entrance:

PIETAS

Funerals

Above it, two silver palm fronds. There were no other firms in the building, only an apartment for the concierge. The latter was indispensable, for many calls came at night.

At the stroke of eleven, I entered his office. I was led not into the waitingroom but directly to my uncle. "Herr Gädke is expecting you," said the secretary when I gave her my name. She pressed a button; my uncle opened the door and ushered me in. His office was plain, but roomy, with a big desk on which there was little paper— all incoming items were processed instantly. No pictures, only a few diplomas and the portrait of the old kaiser in uniform. "Some customers are offended, but I don't care."

After a quick handshake, my uncle put on his spectacles and delved into my credentials; they formed a thick file, which Bertha had put in order. There was nothing amiss in my transcripts — I had done well, indeed, to some extent, very well in the Gymnasium, the university, and also the military — until my desertion. This was a blemish more in my eyes than in Fridolin's.

My uncle read everything carefully, even my swimming certificate and my certificate of membership in the Dynamo Athletic Club in Liegnitz. I saw him nodding his approval several times. Then he took off his spectacles:

"And how are your finances, Friedrich?"

Bertha had thought of that too. I was able to produce bills, receipts, and dunning notices. The bottom line did not look good. My uncle reimmersed himself and shook his head.

"So, more than I thought."

A silence ensued. Finally, he said:

"I will hire you all the same. Leave the bills here; I'll settle them, and you'll also get an advance on your salary. I don't like someone to start out with debts. Mind you: it's a loan."

That was a burden off my mind; it was more than I had hoped for. I thanked my uncle; he shook my hand and said:

"The day after tomorrow is the first of the month; you can begin then. Don't get me wrong: it's on the basis of your credentials. The fact that we are family and that you are even our next of kin is a different kettle of fish. As your uncle, I would have given you the money. But in the office, I am no uncle and you are no nephew; that's what I've already told Friederike."

## *41*

Sergeant Stellmann had expressed himself in similar terms, but more robustly. One of his mottoes was: "I'm a kind-hearted man — but on duty I'm a bastard. And I'm always on duty."

Well, it was not as bad as all that. Ultimately, I count Stellmann among my benefactors. Walking back from Potsdamer Strasse to Steglitz, I stopped off at Rollenhagen's and spent part of my advance on a lobster and a bottle of champagne. The nicest thing of all was that Bertha's face was at last cheerful again. We could now save our furniture from being repossesed.

She had also regained her sense of humor: when we took a nap after the banquet, she said: "You can now stop looking as if you'd seen a ghost."

She was already alluding to my job.

## *42*

At 8:0o A.M. on the first of the month, I began my new job. Uncle Fridolin informed me about my duties; there was truly no question of nepotism. He concluded: "You will start at the bottom and work your way up." Then he introduced me to the chief executives.

I was now a manager at Pietas. "Manager" is a makeshift title, which can mean anything and nothing. It corresponds to the military title "for special services." I was a factotum, a maid of all work, constantly busy, even Sundays and after hours. The concierge would telephone me in emergencies — and everything in this business is an emergency. Furthermore, death comes mainly at night.

Now "at the bottom" did not mean that I had to lay hands on the coffins — there was a special squad for that, the burial men, and they

caused me enough trouble. Pallbearers and gravediggers are a strange guild, they are border crossers of a kind. While they may not philosophize like Hamlet, they are nevertheless concerned with the question of what remains of us. Usually only a couple of bones in the grave or ashes in the urn — that was their conclusion.

But my job was to deal with their functions, not their thoughts. I benefited from my experiences in Liegnitz. All in all, it's always good to have performed rigorous service somewhere. I had to check their suits, their slow, regular pacing, their measured, even slightly sacral movements, their postures down to the mimicry, their solemn faces. It was important that they should not report for work in a tipsy state. Unfortunately, before arriving, they tended to wet their whistles — and rather copiously at that. After a funeral, it was customary — even if they did not take part in the funeral feast, they could usually count on a libation. All in all, I generally got along with them.

## *43*

Thus I often had to deal with cemeteries and crematoriums. I also had to go to their administrations, to churches and registry offices, to suppliers and newspapers. At first, I could barely cope with it all.

Needless to say, given the size of Uncle Fridolin s firm, I had to take care of only one sector; the work was divided among the cemeteries. However, three of them, including a large one, were more than enough. I had relatively little trouble with a Jewish graveyard that had escaped being plowed under. It was small, and a religious organization, the *khevra kadisha* (burial society), did the bulk of our work. This was good, partly because special prescripts had to be strictly observed. No flowers were allowed; Jews lay stones on a grave. I particularly liked this place because of the old, mysterious headstones. Inscriptions that we cannot read inspire a deeper level of thinking — there was a touch of Zion and Babylon to it.

Life in an office was new to me. I got accustomed to it within a year. There are two rules for such work; one: plan; the other: delegate. Little by little, I cut back on the paperwork and made more use of the telephone. This saved a lot of time and a lot of errands. I also knew the partners now, and when my uncle saw that I was proving myself, he gave me a secretary. She prepared the incoming papers; on some I only made a few jottings, chiefly figures; she would call the administrations. Sermon, chapel, flowers, and so forth were then automatically taken care of. Finally, even these jottings were dropped; a small machine stood next to the telephone: I pressed buttons as Bertha had done on the cash register.

## 44

After a year, I was also relieved of making house calls — they are my least pleasant memories. Usually, I was expected, for the bereaved turned to the tried-and-true Pietas after the initial shock. This obtained even for state funerals. The name of the firm, with the palm fronds, appeared between newspaper obituaries and in every subway car. The more lavish the funeral was to be, the more readily they thought of us. Before the war, Uncle Fridolin, together with Grandfather, had started a burial fund; it too flourished, but he terminated it. He said: "That's something for little people" — let them go to his competitors.

I began sighing even before those visits, when I knotted my silver necktie and slipped into my frock coat. What was I in for this time? Who would open the door — the ghostly widow or the weeping maid? No hush can be deeper than in a house where someone has died and the mirrors are draped. I would get involved in turbulent scenes, watch the family standing around the deathbed, and have to prompt anyone who would not reply. Nor was there any lack ofinfamy: the heirs already bickering in the next room, the creditors mobbing the door as they had done after Balzac's demise, the ill-concealed delight ofthe successor in the store, the office, the conjugal bed, rubbing his hands.

## 45

One thing was not as bad as I had pictured it: the close bond between tragedy and business. Whenever I entered as the harbinger of Charon's boat, followed by my assistant with his tape measure, I actually sensed a feeling of relief among the mourners. The chaos was beginning to ease — I could take over some of their worries. And also, the moment comes when, hard as it may be to say farewell, one wishes that the dead person were under the ground.

Then again, I could not neglect business. Once, when I submitted an order to Uncle Fridolin, he said: "They would have been more than willing to spend twice as much for their father and they are even obligated to do so: he was a general. After all, we're not running a charity here."

I took his words to heart; on the other hand, I could not exploit the bewilderment of the bereaved. Gradually, I struck a balance.

Why did I care less and less about these visits the more routine they became? The answer would require a bit of soul-searching, for I would not wish to present myself to myself as a good person.

Nevertheless, the work was stressful. My situation was roughly that of a thespian who has to perform in dramas every evening. At first, he is passionate, then it becomes a daily habit; it imbues his language, his gestures, his acting — the mask becomes constant.

That was what happened to me. Now, when I went to the homes of the deceased, I had no stage fright; this development was harmful to my character.

## 46

It was Bertha rather than I who noticed the change. She said, when I came home exhausted: "You can stop looking as if you've been to your own funeral!" And she was no longer trying to be funny.

When I started neglecting her, my work was only partly to blame. At breakfast, I was already leafing through the newspaper and skimming the obituaries. If was possible that an important death had eluded us. Next I drove to Potsdamer Strasse (for I now owned a car), telephoned, made house calls, and came back in the evening, often tardily. Usually, I read until late at night, since, for me, a day without books is a lost day.

Bertha had to understand that I could not devote as much time to her as back then, in the tiny room where we had huddled together, comforting one another. Poverty unites, prosperity divides. Mercury is detrimental to love.

Once I got the hang of my work, I developed a gambling addiction. Anyone who has been accompanied by success even once in a lifetime is familiar with that addiction. You now enter your office in a good mood instead of with a heavy heart as in the past. Things go smoothly. The way an expert card player shuffles and fans the cards — the sheer act of watching is a delight.

## 47

The atmosphere in our refined apartment grew cooler; we treated one another gingerly. Our alienation expressed itself in trivial matters — say, a necktie that she did not like. Yet she was the one who had given it to me. But it did not go with my suit.

I never allowed an argument to develop, though I am particularly touchy at breakfast. But this was not to her liking either. She would say: "Friedrich, I think you're becoming too glib. Oh, I know: The customer is always right."

I realized it — my work was rubbing off on my character. In

marriage too, an acute attack is better than a chronic disorder; a knock-down, drag-out fight clears the air, and the reconciliation restores domestic peace.

However, I have to do some more thorough soul-searching and ask myself whether my change was not in fact consistent with the core of my being rather than merely symptomatic of an occupational disease.

## *48*

Have I already mentioned that I view myself as capable of getting along with any woman provided I do not find her inherently repulsive? Bertha had realized that too. She once said to me when we were lying side by side: "I believe you love me less because I am I, than because I'm a woman — isn't that insulting to me?"

That was the age-old question of which is preferable: the wine or the beaker? I prefer the wine. The King of Thule drank from a golden beaker, which his beloved had given him; but he tossed it into the sea, gave it back to the mother. There are also earthenware beakers, and perhaps the wine tastes better from them; knowledge and culture are more likely to do damage to love. This is a problem that even the gods argue about; I cannot solve it.

That night, I kept the answer to myself an embrace is the best argument. Now I am not saying that Bertha could not have kept up her side of the conversation and not only because the studies that she had broken off for my sake had been classical languages and therefore mythology as well. She resumed them later on.

## *49*

To deal with Bertha's question in detail, I have to enlist the aid of mythology. Our psychologists and characterologists, often without realizing it, have their roots there too. I get less from their measuring skills than from a chapter of Plutarch or Vico.

What tied me to Bertha was not just taste but also passion. We owe this distinction to Stendhal; it was he who established it. But when passion grew weaker, good taste prevented our having a quarrel a la Strindberg. Nor did another man, another woman emerge. We drifted apart, and this caused both of us distress — certainly Bertha wondered, just as I did, to what extent it was her fault.

She did not hold back with the small overtures at which women are better than we. For example, dates, which we forget more easily

than they do — why were there flowers on the table today? Right — it was the anniversary of our first night together. Then again, a favorite dish would be on the table, or else she was wearing the cheap jewelry that I had given her in our student days, and her hairdo was the same as back then. These were memories of the old times, but only memories.

## *50*

We would have drifted apart even without my work, which occupied me more and more, ultimately affecting my health, especially when the firm rose to sudden notoriety. If anyone was at fault, it was I — because of my character, which was exposed by my profession; however, time would have done the same, even under different circumstances. As a moralist once said: Aging makes not only our profiles but also our characters more distinct.

I wonder whether, in regard to eros, I fit into one of the prevailing typologies. If I were to fill out a test questionnaire, I would be the paragon of a normal spouse. I cannot oblige with any surprise, any physical or mental deviation.

One should not be content with that; statistics are devised for parochial minds. What does, say, the question "What is your favorite color?" mean to someone who feels good in a fog or who is delighted by a palette, an opal, a rainbow, a sunset in Manila? Besides, under every normal stratum, we come upon a more deeply universal stratum, the human one. Man remains *the* enigma per se.

After putting aside the books, I reached a conclusion: You are an erotic nihilist. What does that mean? To put it tritely: the kind of woman I like best is the one whose presence does not disturb me, who is simply not there. This, as I have said, is a very general case, and that was what disturbed Bertha about me.

Now I could get out of the predicament by claiming that I may even be an erotic idealist. A beloved's presence would be disturbing insofar as it interfered with. Aphrodite. The final chamber remains locked, and only a ray of light flashes through. That is the secret reason for so many disappointments.

The yearning for a new life can become very strong. I am thinking of the influence that the Provencal love cult exerted on the Renaissance. *La vita nuova* — nine-year-old Dante is transformed by Beatrice, as P etrarch by Laura; the poem is for human beings what a flood is for the cosmos: a response to vast distances.

However, I do not wish to play the metaphysical swain. Aphrodite may be missing or veil her face: the Great Mother is always there.

Love changes to the extent that materialism progresses.

My nihilism is based on concrete experiences. And, as so often, it was the first encounter that served as a model, preshaping the subsequent ones.

## *51*

It is, above all, the gods who change. Either they assume different forms and faces, or they vanish altogether. But similarities always remain, no matter how many generations are produced. It is the same as with breeds of animals.

I regard it as a mistake to call Dionysus a god; I contest it. He has a place on Mount Olympus as a close relative, also as a guest of honor. Dionysus is more than a god and less — he is earth exposed, nature revealed. He is a demon, a polymorphic Titan. This is not contradicted by one of the myths about him which says he was torn to shreds by the Titans — that is simply the way they are. Dionysus himself is torn, he tears, he is overpowering. His place is not so much on Olympus as in Eleusis, between Persephone and Demeter.

I therefore feel that Old Gunpowder-Head was wrong to put Dionysus as a god opposite Apollo — theirs was actually an encounter between Titanic-demonic and divine power. Still, Gunpowder-Head did understand that this conflict brought forth two kinds of art, especially two kinds ofmusic. He returned to Dionysus. Rather than expatiating on this, I wish to focus on the present. The fact that we, largely in a passive manner, are participating in a fall of the gods is obvious as far away as India and New Guinea. Titanic forces in mechanical disguise are supplanting the gods. Wherever Zeus no longer rules, crown, scepter, and borders are becoming senseless; with Ares, the heroes are making their farewells; and with Great Pan, nature is dying. Wherever Aphrodite is waning, there is promiscuous interbreeding.

The power of Dionysus testifies to the fact that he alone survives. He is the master of festivities in palaces and among the masses, he is at home with princes and beggars. His light enchants the mayfly, which burns itself on him.

## *52*

Aside from being the place where Stellmann used to drill us so hard, the Liegnitz Culture Park was still as unpleasant as could be. Its very name was paradoxical. On weekdays, it served as a training

ground when the area in front of the barracks was occupied; and on Sundays, it was used for parades. The lawn was worn down, flowers were out of the question. At the center of the park stood a gigantic shell, a dud, commemorating, as the inscription on the pedestal explained, the conquest ofthe city. An avenue lined with trees and statues led to this monument. The statues were the artworks, some in plaster, some in concrete. Naturally, they were not meant for eternity. As Zhigalev demands in his program, the elites were liquidated from time to time. The heads of statues, as I witnessed twice, would then be replaced. Likewise, names were deleted and dates changed on street signs and in reference books — in short, there was no more history, just stories.

How could it be that this wasteland was so marvelously transformed for a night? It was a Friday, the First of May. This is a day of festivities and mysteries throughout Europe. In Wurzburg, the devil drove through the city in a splendid carriage. The witches danced on Mount Brocken; Brunhilde was seen in the Valley of the Bode. The poor souls haunted the rivers, infernal bells tolled. In my native Silesia, the people said: If you see a falling star on that midnight, you should dig in your garden; you will find a treasure.

## *53*

Now the pageants had become obligatory, but the day had remained, for every regime lives on mythology, albeit in a diluted form. The crowd must have been inspired by a memory which, after the flags were rolled up, drove them out into the countryside, toward the true master of festivities. He must have, if not appeared, then at least entered; the metamorphosis was extraordinary. I too was overcome, despite my sadness when arriving.

A fog had risen, as often around this time. Stars were probably shining above it, but people and things could be seen only through a dense veil, almost unsubstantially. Music was being played in the taverns of the city, but the only sound that penetrated the Culture Park was the dithyramb of a drum, like the strokes of a faraway gong.

I walked along the great avenue. The statues too had changed; they were neither artworks nor their mockeries. The Party chairman had become Hercules, the hangman had become the ultimate benefactor, the Indian god. Even the concrete revealed its secret: its atoms were also those of marble — indeed, those of our hearts, our brains. An utter hush prevailed: the throngs had scattered throughout the park. They were performing a grand consummation of marriage.

Now I ought to speak about the encounter I had; but words fall

me for the ineffable. Merely breaking the silence would be betrayal. Nothing similar has ever been granted to me again. I do not even know if we touched. However, my nihilism is based on facts.

## *54*

Let us get back to my job. As I have said, I was a climber. There was a surprise — not merely because business was thriving; it was as if a base were being raised to a higher power: a jackpot.

When checking through my papers, Uncle Fridolin had paid special attention to my degree in statistics and media. Indeed, both subjects are important: our dealings rest on statistical foundations, and our needs are aroused by media. The Romans were different: they dealt in hard facts, allowing everyone to form his own opinion. For example, t made no difference to them whether the Jews believed in the Twelve Gods; the Romans nailed no theses on the portals of the Temple of Zion; they merely erected a statue of Caesar in front of it. In our culture, opinions precede facts — that is why media, coupled with statistics, is such an important subject.

Needs are both real and metaphysical; they are geared to life in this world and in another world. The two cannot be sharply separated: they overlap in dreams, in intoxication, in ecstasy, in the great promises.

The art of arousing new needs covers a wide range from the apostle Paul to Edison's inventions. A need can be recognized suddenly or it can spread gradually. Take tobacco: it has come a long way from the first cigar of the Conquistadors to the international power of the cigarette industries.

Why was it that within a few years, Uncle Fridolin's modest firm enjoyed that incredible, virtually uncontrollable boom?

## *55*

It began, as so often, with car trouble. Together with Kornfeld, the sculptor, and Edwin, the chauffeur, I was driving to Verdun, the *Capitale de la Paix,* where we had some business. Edwin was a good driver, but unreliable — an "airhead." I am quoting my uncle who had threatened him several times, saying that "the fifteenth is going to be the first." He also said: "Edwin is the sort who calls in sick on a Monday." That was true, but Edwin made up for it during the week.

And today was Monday; we had spent the night at Kleber's in Saulgau and tasted the wines that thrive along the Neckar. Edwin had

neglected to fill the tank; we ran out of gas on one of the hills outside the Black Forest. It was a lonesome place; no car passed, so Edwin had to take two canisters and go on the road. Actually, we did not mind our sojourn; it was a beautiful morning — we were in the mood for a stroll, a pipe, and a good conversation. A chapel stood on the hill; it reminded me of the chapel on Mount Wurmling near Tubingen — Uhland wrote a beautiful poem about it. A gray wall enclosed the chapel grounds; we entered through the gate and found ourselves in a deserted cemetery. Kornfeld said: "Lo and behold — the lure of the relevant."

Kornfeld was a renowned sculptor, but he no longer practiced. He said: "We sculptors are like the butterfly collectors who hang up their nets because the butterflies are dying out. For us, it is heads that are growing rare. We would have to go to the Africans, and even they…"

He added: "For me, a tyranny would be advantageous, though naturally, I can't say that out loud."

"But Herr Kornfeld — our experiences would tend to confirm the opposite."

"My dear Baroh, you are confusing tyrants and demagogues — that is a common error in our time. The demagogue stirs one and the same dough; he is a pastry chef, at best a plasterer and painter. The tyrant supplies individual shapes. Down to his bodyguards. Think of the Renaissance tyrants ruled everywhere, from every small town up to the Vatican. That was the great era for sculptors, for art in general."

That gave me food for thought. In any case, Old Gunpowder-Head would agree. "Caesar Borgia as pope."

Kornfeld had worked chiefly in marble; he had also studied the ancient kinds, touring the Greek islands in quest of forgotten quarries. One ofhis favorite books was President de Brosses's *Confidential Letters,* which so often talks about marble. Critics and academics are reluctant to mention Kornfeld's name; nevertheless, it pops up precisely when it is ignored. The museums contain some good heads ofhis. But ever since he put down his chisel, he had been doing architectural consultation and designing parks, gardens, and cemeteries. Our trip was linked to such a commission.

No one had been buried on this hill for a long time, and, as Kornfeld said, the place was about to be plowed under. Soon the countryside would consist purely of roads and gas stations. We peered at the headstones, deciphering the inscriptions. One of the deceased had been a hundred years old. We had to lift the ivy off a humble monument and saw that it commemorated the single military casualty that the village had suffered in one of the campaigns of the previous century; the Iron Cross surmounted his name.

The headstones of the parish priests were lined along the wall of

the chapel. The dates reached all the way back to the Thirty Years' War. Chalice and wafer were reiterated in red sandstone from Baroque style to Art Nouveau. A sovereign judge, a seminarian, a man who had been struck by lightning, many children, but mostly peasants who had tilled the soil. Perhaps their families had died out, but the stone preserved their names, stirring the reflections of strangers who, like us today, happened to pass by. They had even memorialized a tightrope walker who had plunged down in the village square.

## *56*

When Edwin had returned with the canisters, and we were driving back to the highway, Kornfeld said:

"Now that was a graveyard worthy of its name. When I think of the cemetery in my hometown, where I may end up: a switchyard, worse than in New York."

He expounded: "You see, I maintain a family vault that I inherited, it dates back to my great-grandfather. I don't know how much longer I can afford it. No year goes by without my being pestered by the administration. The very word 'inherit' annoys people today like 'destiny' or 'the Good Lord.' I'm afraid that the North German lowland has become a seismic area. Now one headstone wobbles, now another, although they're located along the wall and most likely wobble only when some sort ofviolence is inflicted on them. I get bills from stone masons, cemetery gardeners, miscellaneous fees yet one hundred twenty years ago, my great-grandfather paid for the spot once and for all — and in gold. Evidently, more land speculators are at work there than death watchers; that's why most of the old families are giving up their rights."

Kornfeld went on: "The family vaults are then replaced by rows of uniform stones. Those people arrogate authority for themselves even in questions of taste. But just take a look at the Campo Santo in Genoa. It teems with examples of poor taste — and they all combine into a wonderful tableau."

I had to agree. The ahistorical person knows no peace, especially eternal peace. He has adjusted even his graves to his chauffeur style. Like all structures, they are meant to last thirty years. The mourners are content with a standing order at a gardening center. Such is their piety. I was acquainted with it from my job.

"That's the way it is," said Kornfeld, "the old washerwoman who saved up for her funeral, taking her shroud from her chest every Sunday in order to caress it — you'll find her only in half-forgotten

poems."

He mused: "And yet something has remained — you discover it when you scratch the polish: a grieving in November, when the leaves are falling and yet seeds are already stirring in the earth. Believe me: a loss is felt here, a need slumbers here, unsettling everyone, moving everyone."

## *57*

That was how it began, during the drive to Verdun, to one of the great cemeteries. The conversation lodged in our memories; we felt we had touched on an important issue. We then saw a great deal of one another in Berlin, socially too, and developed the theme.

I would like to say to our credit that we initially did not think of business. Kornfeld planned as an architect and artist; his ideal had long been to create harmonious landscapes outside the workaday world. They were meant to inspire pure well-being and meditation — and perhaps also have ritual meaning — preferably both in unison. He frequently quoted a forgotten historian, von Rotteck: "A compilation ofburial customs would be the counterpart of a collection of theories of immortality."

Richly illustrated works, from Vitruvius and Piranesi to Lenôtre and Prince Puckler, were to be found in Kornfeld's library, which led into a map room. I enjoyed being in these rooms. The work wing also included a studio and a drafting room, with an array of marble steps set into the walls. A garden led down to the Spree. In the garden, there were sculptures from the period when Kornfeld had been an active sculptor. Now he employed draftsmen, who also worked for Pietas from time to time. It was in the context of such a commission that I had made his acquaintance.

As regards myself, I was initially moved by only a vague passion. What appealed to me was something general, which I could serve if only by contributing a single stone. With that stone, I would confirm that the Pharaoh is immortal, and everyone carries a pharaoh inside himself.

I thought of great buildings, Kornfeld thought of forests and plains near the Polar Circles. We were united by the conviction that we were on the trail of a yearning. If a need is to be aroused, it has to exist; one cannot talk people into it. Only that which slumbers can be awakened.

We had an idea, but, like any inventor, any author, we had to go and find a reliable partner in order to make it come true. Clearly, we first turned to Uncle Fridolin, but he flatly refused. He was a good

businessman, but averse to fantasies and with no appreciation of art. Furthermore, he did not much care for the thought of eternal resting places. After all, his livelihood depended on as many burials as possible, virtually in rotation. Like many conservatives, he was at the cutting edge when it came to business. Thus, he viewed cremation as a great advance, although he rejected it personally.

## *58*

Sigi Jersson was one of my new friends, perhaps the only one to whom I can really apply that word. We had met in a Jewish cemetery that had been opened only recently. The headstones gave me pause to think: each was shaped like an open book with one or two names inscribed in it; underneath stood a list of the missing — not people who had fallen in battle, but people who had been deported and murdered. Sigi's father was one of them.

We exchanged only a few sentences; but with a genuine affinity, this often suffices to begin a friendship. It can be a wink, an ironic silence that reveals a spiritual rapport. And here there was a lot that had to be veiled.

Sigi visited me in Steglitz, and I visited him in his bungalow at Wannsee Lake, in the Western sector of the city. Bertha was not edified by this acquaintanceship, which contributed to our drifting apart. "He's not your kind — did you see the way he eats asparagus?" This hardly troubled me; after losing Jagello, I was starved for conversation with a historical and literary grounding. Sigi could oblige with both. I could tell from my very first visit to his library that he possessed an inner order. For literati, books are the costumes by which they judge one another. Hume, Machiavelli, Josephus Flavius, Ranke in long, brownish golden rows — there is a mood in which books directly radiate substance.

In time, I needed these visits as much as an old Chinese needs opium. Exhausted, I drove from my dreary office on Potsdamer Strasse to my new friend, if only for a few minutes, and when I left, I was refreshed. Occasionally, I missed dinner and stayed past midnight. Bertha conjectured that I had strayed from the path of virtue and in a way, I had.

Inevitably, we also exchanged personal memories. In our century, almost everyone who has escaped has an odyssey behind him. Sigi came from a family that had lost everything and then become wealthy again. They must have had a natural relationship to money. In this regard, Sigi was no chip off the old block; he was considered a sponger by his rich kinfolk, but his life was free of care, for he had

married within the family.

Sigi's wife was a Jersson by birth, the only daughter of the well-known banker. Her name was Rea, she had dark hair and a very delicate figure. She could have come straight out an Egyptian frieze as one of the slave girls stretching out their arms to offer Pharaoh a gift. Thus, when we were sitting in the library, she would come in, serve fresh tea, and empty the ashtray. I could imagine her breasts. She entered and vanished like a shadow; all that was lacking was for her to knock as on the door of a *chambre separee,* where one does not wish to disturb a loving couple.

## *59*

Indeed, he and I soon grew intimate. Our conversations attained the proper detachment. Strangely enough, it was precisely the skeptical minds that contributed to it: Montaigne, Stendhal, also Lichtenberg — and, among the philosophers, Schopenhauer and Old Gunpowder-Head. Often, hints sufficed, sometimes we became impulsive. One midnight, we embraced and began using the familiar form.

Our intimacy was different from the one I had had with Jagello — there was always a touch of skepticism, as ifwe were poking fun at ourselves. Self-irony is deeply rooted in Jews; it has contributed to their survival. When your life is at stake, the comic role is preferable to the tragic one. Fortune and reputation can be regained, but not life.

Sigi enjoyed discussing such topics. He once said: "If he hadn't done such a good job of helping to boot out the kaiser, then my old man would be alive today."

Sigi's father had run one of the major newspapers. His name, as I have mentioned, was inscribed on one of the marble books.

It had been a strange, yet perhaps not entirely unusual circuit from the Konigsberg Councilor of Commerce to the liberal father and then to Sigi, who had not only frequented revolutionary circles, but also agitated in them. That period had left him with a precise knowledge of the leading figures and the political entanglements, as well as semi-military habits like riding horseback in the Tiergarten every morning.

Overnight, Sigi had discovered conservative tendencies in himself; it took place by one of those meandering routes that seem arbitrary, yet lead to a specific destination. He had studied the trial of a pastor named Schulz, who, partly because of his book, *Proof of the Infinite Difference between Morality and Religion,* had been tried by the Prussian Supreme Court. Sigi had unearthed this trial in the diaries of old

Marwitz, which in turn had led him to Friedrich Wilhelm II, a weak and vice-ridden monarch, under whom the kingdom of Prussia had achieved its greatest expansion. When I first met Sigi, he was absorbed in Vehse's *Tales of the Court;* he confirmed Heine's opinion of the book: "Pure caviar."

Through his new publications, Sigi had, surprisingly, increased his literary renown; the conservatives like it when an outsider joins their ranks. The switch from the extreme left wing to the right wing is not rare in history: it seems to make people's characters sharper, more incisive. It is the switch from idea to pragma, from opinion to facts. It is repeated in both universal and personal history and must reach deep into the material dimension.

## *60*

I hope that my jottings have not jumbled the times too greatly. Often I cannot tell whether I met someone before, during, or after a catastrophe — indeed, I confuse catastrophes with one another. My memory is tied less to places and dates than to the plasmatic substance.

Why did I bring up Sigi? Right: because of Kornfeld and our conversation when our car ran out of gas near the Black Forest cemetery. After returning from Verdun, the capital ofpeace, I dropped in on Sigi, whom I hadn't seen for a week. In telling him about the trip, I happened to mention Kornfeld's anxieties about the eternal repose of his ancestors and then came to the leveling of old memorial places and the general decline ofthe cult ofthe dead. "They should rig up the moon as a mausoleum."

Actually, I had expected an ironic retort, the kind that Sigi loved, but I saw that he grimaced as if I had surprised him with a magic trick from a top hat. Rea had to bring fresh tea. As she was pouring it, he said: "I've reserved a spot for you." And when she had left:

"Friedrich, you don't realize what you've just said: that is the countermove to the motor world."

But then irony came into play after all:

"And it's also good business."

He must have had a Chasidic rebbe among his ancestors.

## *61*

Sigfried Jersson, the great banker, had asked Kornfeld and myself to meet with him: we sat together in his office. Soundproofwalls,

double windows and doors; no noise penetrated.

A man's taste is revealed, at first sight, by the paintings or, if the walls are bare, by the proportions — indeed, even more strongly by the latter: the invisible harmony dominates. This was the case, and I did not feel that something was missing. The main price of such an arrangement is the complete insulation.

Old Jersson was dressed like one of the senior members of the Jockey Club. He would have fitted in there physiognomically as well. His Berlin office was only a *dependance,* but he was often here, for he loved the city. It was rumored that he had once chartered one of the fastest planes in order to take a check to New York; the interest accruing in several hours was greater than the expense. Perhaps this was merely an anecdote, like those told about Rothschild.

Whenever he wanted to peruse a document, he would use his monocle, which was attached to a black ribbon. He did so now as he picked up the presentation that Kornfeld and I had written at Sigi's prompting. It was the only paper lying on the desk. His viewing.2 no doubt, a gesture, for it was obvious, as his quest revealed, that he had perused the contents meticulous I nurtured no great hopes. His invitation was probably sparked by a certain curiosity, or else the banker wanted to do his nephew a favor. Occasionally, such potentates start a firm for poor kinsmen, even lithe business runs purely at a loss. Sigi had once told me: "The old guy often doesn't know what to do with his money. He then drives new nails in to hang it up."

By inviting us, Jersson probably meant to determine whether we were personally reputable or Bohemians with fantastic ideas to Sigi's taste. That was what his questions boiled down to after he sized us up through his monocle. I could introduce myself as having a degree in sociology and as one of the directors of Pietas_ This was not disadvantageous. I noticed that he had had the firm investigated. So our meeting was probably more of a personal introduction, for the banker was also informed about Kornfeld — he asked him several questions concerning geology, which was not a random move, for Jersson had also made quite a name for himself in petroleum and he often dealt with prospectors.

The oil magnates have taken on the role of kings — their nets encompass lands and seas.

The meeting lasted three quarters of an hour, and had been tailored to that timespan, for a secretary appeared without being summoned and saw us out.

Two robust men followed us all the way to the street; they had searched us for weapons when we had entered. As we left, Jersson shook our hands. He said: "My son-in-law is a master ofthe

unprofitable arts, but sometimes a blind chicken can peck up a kernel."

## *62*

Nevertheless, I was surprised that we were invited back. This time, Uncle Fridolin was also there. The banker had flown in from New York and landed on the roof; he presented the summary of his reflections:

"Gentlemen — I have no interest whatsoever in pipe dreams or in running a pious establishment. Funerals have always been a sound business and could become a big business in these times; a genuine and widespread need exists. After reviewing the documents drafted by Messrs. Kornfeld and Baroh, I am prepared to form a company; I would advance the initial capital. I would not like the name of my bank linked to it; I suggest that Herr Fridolin Gädke should sign for the firm. I will have the necessary contracts drawn up and submitted to you by the end of the week."

That was the birth of the firm of Terrestra, under whose aegis our Pietas continued a modest existence, although the impulses radiated from the latter. Jersson then outlined his conception of the development.

First a piece of land had to be found — one that was as cheap as possible, perhaps even gratis. Participation by the owners could even be considered. Jersson was familiar with this procedure from his oil explorations. It would be followed by the purchasing or leasing of land and the signing of contracts with the government. Once all that was settled, the promotional campaign had to be launched and the merchandise offered. Jersson reckoned with a large demand. It should not only cover the initial investment, but also add to the working capital.

Business is, after all, other people's money, and that's what bankers live on. Nevertheless, I was amazed by how precisely this banker had recognized the need. Jersson considered Kornfeld the right prospector; he could use the airplanes that were occupied in the petroleum sector, perhaps even some of the excavating and drilling equipment.

In conclusion, Jersson said: "In a burial, the main point is the digging — it would be good if we could be spared as much of it as possible by doing the proper groundwork." He was obviously picturing what the Swabian calls a "mown meadow." He did not go into detail. Yet we learned how important precisely that tip was.

I ought to describe the ongoing development of Terrestra, although I have been only marginally involved ever since my problem began to afflict me. First, a new office building was put up. Uncle Fridolin had lost his skepticism; he was now as keen as mustard. IfJersson was a genius in financial matters, my uncle was quite gifted. Jersson was the strategist, Fridolin the tactician. He had again reached a new level; this was expressed in his behavior, his modern comforts, and also physiognomically. As Terrestra's reputation grew, he accordingly changed cars; he kept an airplane and gave large dinners. My new office was as spacious as a ballroom, its floor was covered with a Kirman. I had the walls padded with red leather and lined with bookcases containing black binders. When Bertha first visited me there, she said: "Your new style reminds me of a limbo."

There was something to that. I had to cope with the mortuary pomp that conceals the misery, the ephemeralness of the world. Despite the routine, it rattled me. At times, between two visitors, a rumbling came from the silence, like the distant thunder of Doomsday. Bertha had already been averse to my joining Pietas. She might have thought of the Nobis Tavern: this is the inn at the edge of the world, where the dead drink together, swapping their experiences before descending into the depth. Although Kornfeld was still reconnoitering, we began our advertising campaign, accepting deposits in the manner of building and loan associations.

It was my job to advise the promotion department; only a selection of the mail reached my desk. Most of it was processed in the secretary's office, through telephone calls and printed matter. I received inquiries from churches, sects, associations, and important individuals. I also retained the job of offering advice in heraldic matters; this was consistent with my historical interests. Even if the old families no longer played a role in society and had renounced their titles, they nevertheless wanted to be buried in a manner appropriate to their social standing.

Since the reputation of Terrestra soon spread beyond the borders, I had to keep pace with, indeed prepare for, the wishes of a worldwide clientele. This changed my nightly readings; I studied works like Klemm's *Universal Cultural History ofMankind,* De Vries's *Jewish Customs and Symbols,* the Reverend Andreas's *Past and Present Funeral Customs of the Various Nations,* and so on.

The throng of eccentrics, some of whom wanted absurd arrangements, was astonishing; but I do not care to go into detail. Compared with their wishes, Marie Bashkirtseff's famous chapel was child's play. Since most of those people were very rich, we established

a special department: Curiosities.

## 64

What Bertha had said about limbo gave me food for thought in other respects. It appeared as if we were assuming the role of a priesthood or at least an order. Nor was this contradicted by the fact that we were running a business. This was so from the very outset, but it was not the main thing, as Monsieur de Voltaire says. If we keep close tabs on a conjuror and expose his trick, there is nevertheless something to it: he has performed manipulations bordering on miracles. A curtain rises, and someone appears in a tuxedo and a top hat; but behind him there are more curtains.

We had recognized a profound need. The demand can barely be met. Every morning, stacks ofletters arrive and are distributed to the offices. Ever since my problem began gnawing at me, I have been idly daydreaming for hours on end. My eyes alight on the dark binders: an entire shelf is categorized under the label URN. This is an important object for us.

I pull out a binder and leaf through it. A young ceramicist has handed in a suggestion. On the edge of the paper, Uncle Fridolin has written the word "Important!" The ceramicist points out that the traditional round shape of the urn, although age-old, is impractical. More than anything, one would like to find out whom this urn contains, and one would also wish to know the birth and death dates of the deceased and see a motto, a coat-ofarms, a symbolic ornament. A profile of the departed ought to be considered as well. This could lead to a new genre of artworks. Kornfeld had written on the edge of the paper: "Let's hope that collectors don't take it up?"

All this, according to the ceramicist, could be read more easily on a flat surface than on a curve; he therefore proposed manufacturing urns in the shape of dominoes, and he submitted drawings. We might, he said, consider the outline of a house — something similar already existed in Peru.

The correspondence about this matter fills a large volume. But why did Uncle Fridolin commit himself so deeply to this idea? Aesthetic considerations were the furthest thing from his mind. The old Pietas company was as tasteless an establishment as could be. However, an airplane could carry a lot more urns in this new shape than in the usual shape. They could also be stored together seamlessly along the wall of a columbarium without leaving any gaps. Thus Terrestra could offer a resting place *ad perpetuitatem* at a price below that of a normal Berlin funeral.

## 65

I note this detail as an example of blending religion and economics. One could write a book about the history of Terrestra — incidentally, several such books are already in progress. I will therefore be brief.

Kornfeld had completed his reconnaisance within a year, after traveling through all continents and to such islands as Malta and Crete. Nor did he omit Easter Island. First, he had to cross out several possibilities — either because of the expense or because they were not consistent with piety. Regarding the latter, he found that it was especially pronounced among the Etruscans. They were intent on keeping a family together — they therefore set up chambers with comfortable resting places in large hills or under the ground. The walls were adorned with pictures showing the dead feasting and quaffing together, enjoying themselves at play and in love, or hunting. There was no pain, no judgment for the dead, no hell, nor any gravity at these subterranean banquets. However, this would have required moving great amounts of earth, which flouted Jersson's guidelines. Still, the mood was worth emulating. It had been preserved in the funeral towers that the Romans, as successors to the Etruscans, had built in their Asian provinces. There are also suggestions of that mood in the Kidron Valley.

Furthermore, Kornfeld excluded any reminiscences of pyramids and catacombs. In Palermo, he had visited the Capuchine Tomb. There, thousands of fully-dressed mummies lay along, stood at, hung from the walls; it was a spectral world. Among the Etruscans, you feel relieved when you descend; but here, when you see the light again. Nevertheless, Kornfeld had been inspired: he saw how the shape of the body, including its physiognomy, can be preserved without any invasive procedures. We know that repulsive, indeed scandalous things had occurred among the Egyptians. The Capuchines, however, buried their dead fully clothed in hot dunes and then, one year later, transferred them to their tombs. You felt you ran into them at the Quattro Canti.

## 66

Although I could now take very good care of Bertha and fulfill her every wish, she stuck to her modest lifestyle. Having completed her studies, she was preparing for a teaching position. She had moved into a larger apartment only because her old one had become too small for all her books. Books and travels — those were the things she splurged

on. Twice a year, she drove to Greece in her little car. Recently, these trips had extended to the Ionian Coast as well as the Anatolian interior. She had visited Sardis, the residence of Gyges and Croesus, on the ancient golden river, the Pactolus.

When my problem started afflicting me, I went to see her and also spent the night. I slept fitfully, and it was good feeling her next to me, when I suddenly awoke as if plunging from a height. She then switched on the lamp; we chatted, not about my problem, but about her travels; I had her read aloud to me. Now that we had become friends, I understood her better there was still some eroticism, but of a different kind.

She enjoyed hearing my accounts of Kornfeld's investigations. After all, historical, especially archeological interests are closely interwoven with graves; basically, the world is a grave into which the ages descend and from which they rise again like asphodels. These processes are a sowing and reaping, and Orpheus lives in every historian.

Once, right after returning from Asia Minor, Bertha said: "It's obvious why Komfeld visited Knossos, Mycene, and Troy — but why hasn't he been to Cappadocia? That would be the Promised Land for you people."

## *67*

This was the second major turning point in the history of Pietas-Terrestra, if I may call our car trouble near the Black Forest churchyard our first major turning point. When Kornfeld heard about Bertha's suggestion and conned the literature from Herodotus and Pausanias down to the latest travel guides, he hired an airplane, and the three of us flew to Urgup in the middle of Anatolia.

There, with the help of local guides, we wandered through an underground world. It has been known for a long time and it was also opened to tourism in the modem era; but it has never been explored to its full extent. The first person to mention it was Sieur Paul Lucas, a French traveler in the age of Louis XIV. His account, like Marco Polo's description of China, was considered a wild fancy. Who can believe in subterranean cities with churches, streets, marketplaces, stables, granaries — in complexes to which whole nations have retreated at various times? Tools and weapons can be found there, from stone axes to machine guns, steel helmets, and gas masks. Mammoth hunters, Hittites, Assyrians, Phrygians, Lydians, Persians, Turks, magi, Christians, and Muslims have left their traces here.

Whenever we chance upon such a settlement, which has existed

uninterruptedly since prehistoric times, we may assume that the earth has been especially gracious: this high plateau is formed out of a tuffa that can be broken with shovels, yet soon hardens into rock upon being exposed to air. In this respect, it even outdoes molasse.

The corridors, made secure by rolling doors resembling millstones, lead to rooms and chambers that, lying over or under one another, stretch on for very long distances. As I have said, they have been only partially explored.

Kornfeld instantly realized that this and no other place on earth was the proper site for Terrestra. The house, built over millennia, was prepared; only the furniture was missing.

## *68*

But that was not all. In front of these underground cities, there is a forest of towers, at the sight of which Sieur Paul Lucas was utterly astonished: an enormous mass of cones shaped like sugarloaves and often as high as the Castle of St. Angelo. There are well over a hundred thousand; the Turks call them the "chimneys of the fairies." Hermits and monastic orders established themselves in some; a few served as dovecotes, while others are still inhabited today, containing, for instance, a police station. A teahouse had also been set up, and we relaxed there after ascending from the underworld.

As I have said, these towers have been known and also described for a long time; in Kornfeld's library, I came across a six-volume opus by Guillaume de Jerphanion: *The Rock Churches of Cappadocia.*

Kornfeld enlightened me about the geological origins of these formations; I am not sure that I fully understood. According to him, the high plateau was once covered, or rather coated, by a thin, hard stratum; water had seeped in through cracks, disintegrating the friable subjacent rock. Sandstorms had completed the job, grinding the cylinders into shape. It is owing to their caps, which protect them like helmets, that the towers have survived for millennia.

This explanation made it clear to me why the majority of these towers looked like mushrooms with black caps and sand-colored stems, while others, which were not yet completely detached, formed chains.

Thus, along with halls, grottoes, and caverns, there were also unlimited numbers of tumuli beckoning to Terrestra.

## *69*

In this way, the first stage ofthe undertaking was completed according to Jersson's guidelines, and far more favorably than we had hoped. We could now focus more strongly on promotion.

To start with, we had to think about acquiring the land. A lease would have to be obtained for an unlimited time or, as the phrase goes, "in perpetuity"; for that was the only possibility in keeping with Terrestra's plan and its unique offer. Fortunately, the terrain, although gigantic, was a wasteland. Here too we had unexpected luck.

Once again, a military regime had taken the helm in Anatolia; the name of the general who controlled the good and bad weather was Humayum. There were old connections with him, partly through a bank that Jersson maintained in Istanbul. The general was in a quandary both at home and abroad; oil and foreign currency were lacking, the prisons were overcrowded. He had to be on good terms with the democracies. As a result, we could look forward to striking a deal with him.

Actually, I was supposed to negotiate it. The banker knew that I had studied media; furthermore, aside from Kornfeld, I was the one most familiar with the plan. But I had to refuse, for by then I was already doing only half a job, although I was still accessible.

How was it that he decided on Sigi? After all, the banker had no lack of promoters who had proved their worth in the petroleum trade. Sigi lived a Bohemian life and despised business; he had been active for only a few weeks, playing the role of a sort of government minister. Perhaps Jersson merely wanted to hand his nephew and son-in-law a job on the Terrestra payroll. It could do no harm, for the general was bound to accept our offer.

Be that as it may, Sigi was a good choice. He had a Levantine vein; in corruption, it usually goes a lot further than Hanseatic scrupulousness. Besides, in his pocket, he had a Swiss check made out for a princely sum for charitable purposes — a further sign that Jersson's trust in him had grown.

## *70*

I have no idea how much Sigi embellished the report on his mission; he had a theatrical gift. Humayum was rather corpulent for a general. He wore no stars, there was no decoration at his throat; but he did sport a palette of parti-colored ribbons, as is customary in these higher ranks. Coins and stamps showed him in profile; the artists had stylized his profile into that of an eagle.

The conversation had started in the general's home and had concluded during a horseback ride around the old city walls of

Istanbul.

The general had begun with the question:

"So you want to import corpses? Don't you feel we have enough of them already? Wouldn't that be carrying coals to Newcastle?"

"General, we are supplying them for free. And besides, they will bring you a good return."

The discourse would have been worthy of the quill of a Goldoni, but I do not wish to elaborate on it. Contact between idea and business is unavoidable, but one should secrete the details — they had already tormented me during my house calls for Pietas. What's more, Sigi had a feeling for cynical comments and Humayum for pungent remarks. A dictator appreciates both; they make him look as if he would stop at nothing.

That is why I want to get to Sigi's results immediately. The general had been convinced of the importance of the plan "right off the bat" — if only because it was backed by the mighty Jersson. The installations alone would open up a territory that had previously been visited purely by tourists. Many hands would be needed. Men and women who eked out wretched livelihoods here or became guest workers in Western countries would earn a living in situ. Rivers that had long since dried up would once again yield gold.

That was only the start. If Terrestra succeeded in creating a huge religious site here, a central cemetery for the planet, then not only the dead would come — it would turn into a place of pilgrimage, for greater and greater hosts of the bereaved and the devout.

The check had also buoyed up Humayum's optimism. He shook Sigi's hand: "Dear friend, my best to your uncle; I am with you — you can send a telegram to the pope."

## *71*

Sigi had soon tired of his job; he returned to his Prussian biographies. His uncle had provided him with a handsome commission.

The signing of the papers was followed by a flood of applications. They covered a lot more than the advance payment before a single spit had been turned. Promoters from the oil trade drafted pamphlets, which were sent out into the world. These men gave free rein to their sense of humor. For example: "We cannot promise you eternal bliss, but we *can* promise you eternal rest." Or:

"Would you like to be united with your loved ones forever?" Also: "We offer protection in our towers and vaults, for the living as well." Secondary businesses were already crystallizing; travel agencies,

airlines, insurance companies, hotels, emergency accomodation in case of a catastrophe. It was good that we had Jersson backing us: it all went far beyond the capacity of Pietas. On the other hand, it is amazing how simple a business becomes when it expands on a large scale. Uncle Fridolin was not up to it; he had a knack for details, but not for simplicity.

Soon, orders arrived. The first letter that comes to mind was from a woman living on a government pension in a small town near Hanover. She had always been haunted by the nightmare "that the gravediggers would dig her up again" — now she offered her life savings for a modest plot in Terrestra. She also wanted to take along her daughter, who had been dead and buried for years now. My uncle did not know Saint Lactantius even by name; but in this case, he followed the saint's maxim: "We cannot neglect our obligation to bury anyone, even strangers; for it there are no kinfolk, they are replaced by humanitarianism." The woman and her daughter received free graves and free airfreight. A good beginning; it was written up in the newspapers.

That was small potatoes; the first large crop was brought by a Brazilian sect, which purchased one of the subterranean halls. They all wanted to be with their guru. They also set up a chapel there. It promised to draw many periodic visits.

The churches smelled competition. They, in turn, offered sites — but how could they vie with Terrestra. Whenever a new municipal councillor took office, he did not feel bound by any contract; the soil turned into capital. Parking lots and high-rises covered the old ground; the graves were demolished by excavators.

One of our departments had the task of purchasing relics, another had to computerize standard reference works like *Who's Who* and the *Almanac de Gotha;* whenever someone with a rank and name passed away, Terrestra offered its services. Some people had already signed contracts with us and had viewed their future sites during a vacation trip.

The demand for towers was surprising — but luckily we had any number of them. One fortunate detail was that families, clans, and other groups did their own furnishing and decorating; it reduced our workload. A primal instinct was rearoused. Supposedly, even elephants head toward a common graveyard when the end is nigh.

## *72*

I also benefited personally from my insurance background. Terrestra soon appeared to be growing exuberantly. Travel agencies

for the living became larger than those for the dead. Then the hotels, the carpenter's shops, the stonemason's studios, both in situ and in various countries, all the way to the orchid gardens in Singapore.

Permanent services had to be established — say, for placing wreaths on specific dates or for eternal lights and other ritual objects. The Chinese, who soon became our best clients, wanted small oblations to be served, and they also set great store by protection against spirits. Despite Uncle Fridolin's resistance, I had made sure that no machines were used; for their final journey, the dead were to be carried on shoulders, and no electric light was to burn in the vaults. Many hands had to be employed, which pleased the general. In his opinion, unnecessary work is of greater social benefit than necessary work, which is inevitable and emerges of its own accord. But we were supplying him with the construction of pyramids.

Although the burials have already commenced, we are still setting up shop. The process resembles that of the oil business; but while the latter robs the earth, we enrich it — and all the way to the frontier of time, beyond which a dead planet will orbit around the sun.

Tombs that no one tended anymore were earmarked for being walling up, and a mere rumor about the method involved would scare off any grave robber. Here too, Jersson's genius has proved itself. For the capping, he wants to use a layer of refuse: not only will it cost nothing, but Terrestra will reap high profits by recycling it. Truly a man who knows how to sail in every wind.

## *73*

Construction of the central airport is complete; it is ringed by hotels, banks, office buildings. At the end of the runways there are storehouses for freight. From there, conveyor belts lead to a second complex. The latter is the size of a medium city. This is where the procedures begin with which we are familiar from Pietas. They occupy all the dealers, artisans, and artists who have mortuary obligations.

The path continues to the religious sites. Options for freethinkers and sun worshipers have already been granted; however, the old and venerable communities are also involved. We were surprised by the requests for new graves for people already buried — and not just individuals. A growing majority seems to be dissatisfied, even depressed, especially in the industrial countries. People do not even wish to be buried there anymore.

During their final journey, the dead are carried along an avenue of cypresses; it ends at a gate. The gate does not bear Dante's inscription; rather, in many languages, alphabets, and ideograms, it

says: "Room for every hope."

We soon realized that a single gate was not enough.

## 74

The further the plan was implemented, the less I participated mentally and physically. That is the fate of all Utopias — the way a Leonardo and even a Jules Verne envisioned human flight was different from the way we have made it come true. We live more strongly in dreams; this is where our strength pours forth and stops. My nihilism contributed to my bad mood.

I had conceived a necropolis on a global scale, a shore for Charon's boat, and the restoration of their dignity to the dead. Culture is based on the treatment of the dead; culture vanishes with the decay of graves — or rather: this decay announces that the end is nigh.

I still consider it a good idea to exorcise the dead and to create a site for them before progress wipes us out — and besides: such a place would make sense despite, indeed precisely because of, that destruction.

I was irked by the business that kept thriving more and more, to the delight of Jersson and Uncle Fridolin, while prompting Sigi to crack macabre jokes. He had read somewhere — in the Talmud, I believe — that on Judgment Day, the believers will awaken in their graves and head toward Zion, and he pictured the march of the dead from Terrestra. From there, it was not far to the Temple.

My complaint must have also had physical causes or affected my body. I suffered from insomnia, but daydreamed constantly at home and at the office. When I had bad headaches, I found food repugnant; I drank all the more. I felt as if I had stepped outside my own body; it was only at night, when, holding a candle in my left hand as I drunkenly gazed at my image in the mirror, that I recognized my identity. I would then feel as if I were becoming too powerful for myself.

I seldom visited Bertha; I was afraid she would hear my soliloquies. She wanted me to consult a doctor — a psychiatrist, of course. I would have been fair game for him, he would have sent me from one colleague to another all the way to the madhouse. But for that, I have no need of a Holy Helper.

## 75

So far, my story is a statistical matter, under the subheading:

Personal success after difficulties in war and civil war. These ascents occur not only in business, but also in art and science. Like a winning lottery ticket, they presuppose an enormous number of losers.

Nor do I consider unusual that stage of nihilism in which I abide as in a waiting room, half bored, half expecting the warning bell. Individuals become passengers, and it is surprising that the waiter still takes their order? Given the sinister way in which our world is changing, almost everybody ought to be familiar with this mood, in which one begins to doubt rationality. Perhaps the whole thing is a ghostly dream.

Fear only intensifies the confusion. The individual person has always experienced that; but we are not yet familiar with titanic dimensions. When an illness becomes serious, and destruction looms, we fall prey to despair. This applies even more to mental disorders than to physical ones. What, in contrast with that, are wealth and success, such as I have gained at Terrestra? They are actually burdensome, and so is society — one seeks a hole to creep into.

Frederick III, German Emperor, King of Prussia, ruled for ninety days before succumbing to his *cancer* of the larynx. I can picture Bismarck going to the monarch's bed and submitting documents for him to sign. What are provinces, the Black Eagle, unrest in the Silesian mining districts, compared with the small knot in the throat — the kaiser no longer listens to the chancellor, he pays heed only to clearing his throat, torturously forcing the mucus through the tube. Man is alone.

## *76*

However: madness is only part of my problem. It would be an ordinary case. As such, it would again be a statistical matter, and I would have to put up with it for better or worse. I am mulling over another possibility. It is: "Madness or more?" Bertha thinks I have to overtrump — this is in keeping with my character. Fate has set up a hurdle for me. Behind it, the abyss; perhaps I can leap across both.

I have to make sure that my notes do not crisscross, for I am traveling on two tracks: along the curves of my feverish dreams and also in reality. Collisions threaten, but perhaps the convergence will work out. After all, parallel lines supposedly meet at infinity. Could this be also possible in time — that is, in life, even if only in echoes? The dream vanquishes reality; it transforms it into poetry, into an artwork. I believe that this is how every great turning point has been reached. It was preceded by madness. Mohammed strikes me as a good example.

A loss of individuality may be an additional factor. Doctors have a special term for that. I have not yet mentioned my grandmother, who died long ago, but who visits me in dreams. It is chiefly to her that I owe my intimate knowledge of our family history, which goes back all the way to legendary times, and whose figures are so fully merged with mine that I sometimes sense as awake: that was not I, that was my father or grandfather, perhaps even an anonymous forebear.

## *77*

Something wishes to alight — an eagle, a nutcracker, a wren, a jester? Why me of all people? Perhaps a vulture — I have liver problems now too.

There are transitions in which dream and reality fuse — as a rule, shortly before one falls asleep, and also before one awakens.

Now I have to keep a cool head like a captain whose ship has gone offcourse. The ship is my world. The control room is still safe even if water has penetrated one of the watertight compartments or fire has broken out in it. I can still make decisions, which, as in a will, are valid and effective even after death.

My complaint is not housed in my brain. It is lodged in my body and, beyond that, in society — the cause of my illness. I can do something about it only when I have isolated myself from society. Perhaps society itself will help by casting me out. Perhaps I will soon be interned. I am still cautious, even with Bertha. I also have to pay heed to my soliloquies — when I recently said, "But I want to enter a prison, not a sanatorium," she was momentarily taken aback.

In a cell, I could keep elaborating, working on the material without disruptions from the outside. Whether or not this effort will produce results is beside the point; I watch over and preserve the treasure in the cave, in solitude — all by myself. Then I could step forth like an anchorite from his fantastic world. However, my reclusion would be closer to fiction, to poetry, and stronger than actual events.

Let the world go under; it is mine, I destroy it in myself. As the skipper, I could steer the ship into the reef — this would not mean awakening, it would mean sinking to a new depth of dreaming. The cargo would then be all mine. Even Alexander was more powerful in his dreams than at Issus — India was not enough for him.

Something flies up, riches pour in. I have to decide how to cope with them. But it shall not be in Aladdin's manner.

## *78*

Headaches, seizures, visions, strange voices, unexpected encounters, voluntary or forced isolation. Madhouses are the monasteries of our world. Whatever happens in laboratories is the work of the lay brothers and nothing more.

The lay brothers carry out orders; they know not what they do. Even in the realm of great politics, where millions of lives are at stake, the wretchedness of the actors is obvious. By what principles are they selected?

Aladdin was the son of a tailor in one of the countless cities of China, a playful boy — but only he could dig out the treasure. How was it that the Mauretanian, a man of profound knowledge, could hit upon this dreamer? He employed magical writings, the sandbox, mantic and astrological skills.

I do not regard Phares as a magus. I am unsettled by him, but I do not feel damaged. Naturally, we become suspicious when someone walks in and offers us a blank check. This is a major theme in fairy tales, legends, and religion. The issue is the decision between mental and physical, between spiritual and concrete power — in a word, the issue is salvation.

Perhaps it was an ordeal for which Phares led me into his grotto. It bordered on the Terrestra territory; the walk or the vision must have occurred at the time that the business with the dead left me extremely dissatisfied. Incidentally, our treasure chambers cannot be compared to Aladdin's — they are bursting with energy. Aladdin's lamp was made ofpewter or copper, perhaps merely clay. Galland's text reports nothing about this matter — all we learn is that the lamp hung from a grotto ceiling. It was not lit, but rubbed, to make the genie appear. He could put up palaces or wipe out cities overnight, whatever the master of the lamp commanded. The lamp guaranteed dominion as far as the frontiers of the traveled world from China to Mauritania. Aladdin preferred the life of a minor despot. Our lamp is made ofuranium. It establishes the same problem: power streaming toward us titanically.

## *79*

So Phares is no magus? Then what is he? Perhaps a suggester of extraordinary power? He shows a pebble and transforms it into gold. Yet does not every pebble contain gold just as every woman contains Helen of Troy? All we have to do is advance to the godhead.

We must also ponder whether we are dealing with auto-suggestion. A deep desire projects its dream image into the world. It intensifies, supplants, concentrates reality. For the people around you,

you become a pathological case, unless you convince them. They even desire this.

Genesis must be based on very ancient lore. Reading it is like looking at a new building constructed on the ruins, and with the rubble, of a pre-Babylonian palace. We can leave Jehovah aside. But the rib that could not have been made up. Adam is the perfect human being, neither male nor female, but androgynous like the angels — he had the female branch off from him as a dream image. Our desire is merely the perception of loss — a shadow of that first desire, which bore fruit.

## *80*

A nebulous yearning for other worlds is as ancient as man himself. Today it has technological features; our expectations of alien guests and their landing have been haunting our imaginations for some time now. We must take this seriously, firstly as a symptom.

Bizarre aircraft are depicted, challenged, exposed as mirages. They serve as a bait and a mechanism for the imagination; on the other hand, they indicate wishful thinking. The automatic apparatus is consistent with the spirit of the times. The end of the world, a vision at every millennium, likewise presents itself as a technological catastrophe.

How bizarre that alien guests are expected now of all times, when astronomical investigations seem to have demonstrated that the stars not only are not, but cannot be, inhabited. This simply indicates the depth of our yearning. People feel more and more strongly that pure power and the enjoyment of technology leave them unsatisfied. They miss what used to be angels and what angels gave them.

A propos, I do not think that technology contradicts the great change. It will lead to the wall of time and it will be intrinsically transformed. Rockets are not destined for alien worlds, their purpose is to shake the old faith; its hereafter has been shown wanting.

## *81*

My encounter with Phares was preceded by a growing disquiet or agitation. The disturbances were both optical and acoustic. We must distinguish between the external and the internal images that we regard as mirages; yet they can assume shapes that ultimately convince. In the deserts, the transition was produced by mortification of the flesh. In my case, it was involuntary; I had lost my appetite long

ago. For years, I have been convinced that we are living in a desert, with technology contributing more and more to its size and monotony. And, incidentally, that the imagination is provoked by monotony.

Whenever I was writing, at the Terrestra office or, even better, at home, and I closed my eyes, the afterimage of the page and its letters appeared to my mind's eye. This is a universal experience; the script becomes illegible, it looks ornamental.

However, the sentences that appeared to me were legible, yet they did not correspond to my text — communications virtually dictated in automatic writing. They were mostly unpleasant. "Your hands are dirty" or: "The dogs are calling you." Also: "Think of Liegnitz" and: "You misunderstood Bertha." Often I could not tell whether I was hearing or reading these things.

It was the same with the visions: they followed a mental clouding that turned into daydreams. Gradually, everyday life became less persuasive and dreams more so.

I sensed a world to which Phares would lead me, and I heard his voice: "Soon you will learn what you do not know yet."

## *82*

Why did he address me of all people? Were there contacts? I recall the Liegnitz park and my basic nihilistic mood. Nihilism must not be followed by any new idealism — it would be doomed from the very outset or it would lead, at best, into a romantic cul-de-sac. The break must be radical.

And then the world of graves. I have noticed that constant dealings with the dead lend a spiritualistic aura to even the lower forms ofwork. This aura has concentrated, perhaps partly because Terrestra succeeded as something more than simply an extension of Pietas. Graves are the beginning of humanity and not just of culture.

Be that as it may, my encounter with Phares must have been prepared, albeit in a dreamlike way. As we exchanged greetings, I already had a strong sense of déja-vu.

## *83*

Happiness is imparted to us only fleetingly. In euphoria, time passes us without a trace; it is annihilated by high degrees of pleasure and knowledge. On the other hand, pain and time are inseparably blended. This touches on the imperfectness of Creation; the religions have recognized this. A few blame the gods, others mankind, still

others fate. We live in a world without peace.

How was it that the moments of happiness in Phares's garden increased? I almost said, "expanded" — but that is not the apt word; bliss knows no measurable time.

I should have been surprised that the garden had trees and flowers, but not animals. Phares said: "We can integrate them, but we do not bother." Now whom did he mean by that "we"? Himself and his ilk or even himself and me?

If the garden had no animals — then why blossoms in their marvelous splendor, such as one senses behind the rose and the hibiscus shortly after awakening? The garden lacked bees and butterflies, for which their labella and calyxes are formed, and even the pollinating wind. Perhaps it was the fragrance that united them, or else they faced one another like magnetic mirrors. I could sense their strength even in the darkness, indeed more sharply then.

"Phares said" — but did he actually speak? I saw him move his lips, I could understand him from far away, in thunderstorms and naturally also in dreams, with my inner ear. So I do not know whether I heard him or whether he spoke. I mused about it for a long time and my guess is that he knows the primal text, of which all human as well as animal languages are merely translations or effusions. As are the rustling of forests and the murmuring of wellsprings; the souls of plants are still closest to the divine world. They convince as metaphors.

Phares probably aims at bridging, if not overcoming, dualism and reaching back through the dichotomies including the divisions into plants and animals or into sexes; but first, the foundations of good and evil had to be shaken. Then the barrier between men and gods could also collapse.

I could already feel that our encounter satisfied my nihilism. I could tell by symptoms too — especially a new affection that both surprised and delighted Bertha and me. It was as if we had never known one another before.

I noticed in general that the people I dealt with as well as strangers I encountered in the street had more to say to me than a bit earlier. And even Terrestra appeared to me, indeed in a new light, as a worthwhile task.

## *84*

My being animated by a new spirit is something I perceive in the fact that I have jumped ahead, for I am still with my problem — say, with the decisions demanded of us by the power that streams toward

us. Aladdin could limit himself to comfort; with Budur he had nothing more than a happy marriage. That is how simple minds behave: they remain untouched by stronger temptation. Even concern about society, say, "the welfare of the fatherland," on which they could focus their power, is alien to them. I thought about that, albeit only for an instant, but my nihilism leads to other considerations.

A description that designates itself as a problem can offer no solution. Deeds and images still attack one another. "I am in action," Jellicoe radioed to the Admiralty when it demanded reports from him during the naval battle.

Today, solutions are really white lies, for they do not belong within the framework of our times: perfection is not their task. The approach can only be gradual. Aladdin's problem was power with its delights and dangers; yet it seemed to me that Phares had nothing in common with the genie of the lamp. It makes a difference whether demons or messengers knock at the door.

## *85*

The initial contact was fairly banal; it resulted from one of the letters that arrived at Terrestra. The precipitous development of the firm required more and more advertising for open positions. It is an old experience that mid-level positions are easy to fill. But top-level positions are a different story. The China market had soon reached first place. It began with inquiries and orders from the peripheral areas: Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, scattered communities in South East Asia, New York's Chinatown. Plus the Chinese restaurants, the silk and porcelain boutiques in all the big cities around the world. Their proprietors along with their staffs wanted to do something for themselves and their ancestors. A coffin was once again considered a nice present.

Then, with the return to capitalism and the loosening of borders, the flood of mail came from the Middle Kingdom itself. It was overwhelming. We needed a senior executive who both had special experience and was a genius at planning.

In such cases, it is hard to choose. Some people waste their time and energy on secondary stipulations, others wreak havoc with outlandish ideas. The category to which each belonged was usually apparent in the applications, which were read by various people in the company, including graphologists; I received the digests.

Thus, Phares's application likewise reached my desk after being routed through numerous offices. Good knowledge of languages, many years in the Far East, excellent penmanship. Several passages were

painted in ideograms. This was not unusual, for some of the applicants were Chinese. We had special readers for them.

The question about nationality was answered with: "Cosmopolitan." Place of residence: "Adler's Hotel." While, or rather before, reading it, I saw that the letter was addressed to me personally. The impression was that of an afterimage: we close our eyes, and the inner text appears. I read it like a painting and discovered unmistakable engrams — for instance, among the positions previously held: "Landscape gardener in Liegnitz, Silesia." Some details could be known only to Bertha and myself, others to myself alone.

I remembered the signs as if I had carved them into a tree trunk years ago. Now they became visible; I did not notice that they were in the Chinese text. But I grew more and more dumbfounded as I read the letter if it was a dream, then it was no ordinary one. It dawned on me that I could not invite the sender to come to my office, for I was the recipient of the invitation — so I immediately dropped what I was doing and walked through the Tiergarten to Adler's Hotel. It was a spring morning, and I was gratuitously cheerful — elated.

Wilflingen, January 6, 1982

# AFTERWORD. THE PARABLE ALADDIN'S PROBLEM OF BY MARTIN MEYER

A major influence on the German novelist Ernst Junger was the philosophy of Swedenborg, who presented his cosmic spirituality in *De commercio animae et corpods* (1769): God must envelop all spiritual things in visible garments, for that is the only way a finite human being can perceive the intention of Creation. Hence, matter must also be viewed as the reflection of the spiritual. The soul is the organ that must forge the link between the phenomena and their divine origin — but it can only be the soul of an initiate, whose "internal breathing" carries thoughts. In this manner, the mystical experience ofin-tuition "reconstructs" the primal *images.* What we have here is the neo-Platonic notion ofthe soul.

Junger, haunted by the issue of matter in the *modern* materialistic world, rejected any metaphysical *deprecation* of that concept. And that was the start of the "problem" — a term he even considered worthy of being used in a title: *Aladdin's Problem,* initially published in 1983. At first, this brief four-part novel seems to have little to do with a metaphysical "appreciation" of matter. In his habitual way, the author introduces a first-person narrator who, although not yet forty, has already dealt with and transcended a number of experiences. Friedrich Baroh begins his story by mentioning a "problem," one that bedevils him, casting gloom on his existence. He is forced to spend more and more time mulling over it, whereby his everyday life becomes secondary to this preoccupation. He therefore recalls his past, filling us in on his background. However, we learn nothing about the nature of his problem.

Baroh has served in the Polish People's Army — originally as a soldier, bullied by a vicious sergeant; then as an officer. In the military, he makes no waves, living as what Junger labels an "anarch," conforming unenthusiastically to the system; he spends quiet hours with a friend, a Polish officer, meditating on historical events and on their causes and premises. One day, Baroh flees to the West, where he attends university, marries, and eventually becomes an executive trainee in his uncle's funeral parlor.

After realizing that people without history have no peace and that even our graves fit in with the "chauffeur style," Baroh attempts to compensate for this lack. He starts deepening his knowledge of funeral customs and — in "a countermove to the motor world" — he founds

Terrestra. His firm offers interested clients resting places for all eternity, permanent gravesites. Terrestra buys an extensive and intricate catacomb system in Anatolia; and before long, business is booming. "A primal instinct was rearoused."

But ultimately, success merely increases Baroh's frustration, and the fewer the demands placed on him, the more his problem gains the upper hand. In the last part of the novel, he admits, or at least hints at, the location of his pain.

My complaint is not housed in my brain. It is lodged in my body and, beyond that, in society — the cause of my illness. I can do something about it only when I have isolated myself from society. Perhaps I will soon be interned.

Baroh is spared this fate not only by camouflaging his existence as an outsider. In the end, he also finds salvation. He tells about "messengers" knocking on the door. The response to his vague yearning for the absolute are voices and inspirations.

Something wishes to alight — an eagle, a nutcracker, a wren, a jester? Why near me of all people? Perhaps a vulture — I have liver problems now too.

The delicately ironical allusion to myth does not cloak the issue for long. Baroh, now living in an expectant mood, receives a letter of application from a man named Phares. He knows — although he cannot really know it — that this person will initiate him into the mysteries of a world that conceals meaning behind the phenomena. For Phares, we are told, is conversant with the "primal text, of which all human as well as animal languages are merely translations or effusions."

Now we understand what this "problem" is all about: the narrator is tormented by the both personal and social dilemma of having to live in a nihilistic culture that, in the wealth of available knowledge, has lost all connection to "meaning": "Aladdin's problem was power with its delights and dangers." And also: "Aladdin too was an erotic nihilist…."

What does that mean? The Aladdin metaphor, often encoded, often merely whispered in a subordinate clause, keeps recurring throughout Ernst Junger's late works. On December II, 1966, in Lisbon, the author, thinking about secular and spiritual treasures, notes:

As for other treasures, like that of the Nibelungs, only legend knows about them. They rest in the depths: hauling them to the surface can spell disaster, as described in Germanic myths or Oriental fairy tales. What they mean is the world's hoard, from which we live, albeit only on the interest, only on an effulgence that comes from an unattainable distance. Even the sun is merely a symbol, a visible

reflection; it belongs to the temporal world. On the other hand, every treasure that is gathered on earth remains a simile, a symbol. It cannot suffice; hence, our ravenous, our insatiable hunger.

The story that best reflects this conflict, if not explicitly, then allegorically, is *Aladdin's Problem.* What has Baroh learned? That after 1888, Germany's Year of the Three Emperors, History flows into the Post-History of "Titanism." ("Titanism" is the adaptation of ancient myth to modern reality. The Titans, issuing from the union of Gaea and Uranus, are representatives of the primal cosmic powers.) What else has Baroh learned? That this Titanism subjugates all material and spiritual resources in order to rule over the "temporal world" as a demiurge. That the "primal text" thereby turns more and more into silent hieroglyphics. "Aladdin" is Junger's "worker" — the "titanic" agent, who mines and controls the energies of the earth, deluding himself into believing that eventually he will achieve perfection by containing and contenting all needs. This is intimated but not "explained" in the first edition of the novel. The second version, published here by Eridanos, then adds a passage right before the next-to-last paragraph of Chapter seventy-eight. The reliance on allegorical power did not suffice; now this truth is pinpointed:

Aladdin's lamp was made of pewter or copper, perhaps merely clay. Galland's text reports nothing about this matter — all we learn is that the lamp hung from a grotto ceiling. It was not lit, but rubbed, to make the demon appear. He could put up palaces or wipe out cities overnight, whatever the master of the lamp commanded. The lamp guaranteed dominion as far as the frontiers of the traveled world — from China to Mauritania. Aladdin preferred the life of a minor despot. Our lamp is made of uranium. It establishes the same problem: power streaming toward us titanically.

What must happen not only to keep matter from being utilized for the destruction of humanity and its planet, but also to have it go through a process of "spiritualizing," of harmonizing? The author supplies no answer to this question anymore that he did in *Eumeswil,* a novel he published six years before *Aladdin's Problem.* However, at the end of the latter story, he brings in Phares, whose task it is to encourage Baroh to cope with his skepticism. This mysterious personage already appeared in Junger's earlier fiction *Heliopolis* — as commander of the space ship that carries Lucius de Geer toward the infinite edges of the universe. Phares is a bringer of light. His name comes from the French word *phares,* meaning "beacons, lighthouses." "Les Phares," a poem in Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil,* celebrates eight artists whose works, like beacons, illuminated the darkness of the world. In *Aladdin's Problem,* Phares once again stands for an unknown power beyond the shocks and tremors ofthe world

oflife. He is an emissary who is familiar with the primal text; a mentor with Gnostic instruction. For the Gnostics of Late Antiquity, knowledge appears when the "call" is heard: this "call," as Irenaeus explains, draws both salvation and liberation from the fetters ofthe world. It is precisely this "call" that Friedrich Baroh ultimately follows.

Nevertheless, he is left with the feeling that all earthly things suffer from the imperfectness of Creation. The final station on this road is death. Death claims not only the individual existence but also the historical eras:

After all, historical, especially archaeological interests are closely woven with graves; basically, the world is a grave…

Such are Baroh's musings when he is about to do commerce with the human need for permanence. "A resting place *ad perpetuitatem":* the formula pops up again. As a narrative, *Aladdin's Problem* elaborates on the insight that even "eternal" rest is disrupted by the incessant hustle and bustle, the endless upheavals in the Age of Titanism. Actually, Junger has been explaining this theme since his early journals. Thus, in September 1943, he talks about a book he has perused, Maurice Pullet's *Thebes, Palais et Necropoles* (Thebes, Palaces and Necropolis):

While reading, I again realized how thoroughly, albeit on a lower level, our museum-like existence corresponds to the cult of the dead among the Egyptians. Our mummy of culture parallels their mummy of the human image, and our anxiety about history matches their anxiety about metaphysics: we are driven by the fear that our magical expression could go under in the river of time. Our resting in the bosom of the pyramids and in the solitude of caverns amid artworks, writings, implements, icons of God, jewelry, and rich funereal goods is aimed at eternity, albeit in a more subtle fashion.

His awareness of being involved in a gigantic historical catastrophe led Junger's reflections toward an "anxi

ety about history." Exactly forty years later, he was as agitated as ever about the "chassis" of civilization. However, by the time he penned

*Aladdin's Problem*

at the age of eighty-five, this angst had gained a sharper metaphysical, and ultimately also a personal profile. The author's own mortality was casting its shadow, as he implies in 1984, in

*Author and Authorship:*

Time is the great, indeed the only source of tragedy. The vanquishing of time is the great task, one that only leads to symbols. Time overpowers, it cannot be overcome.